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THE MAN OF THE HOUSE

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THE MAN OF THE HOUSE

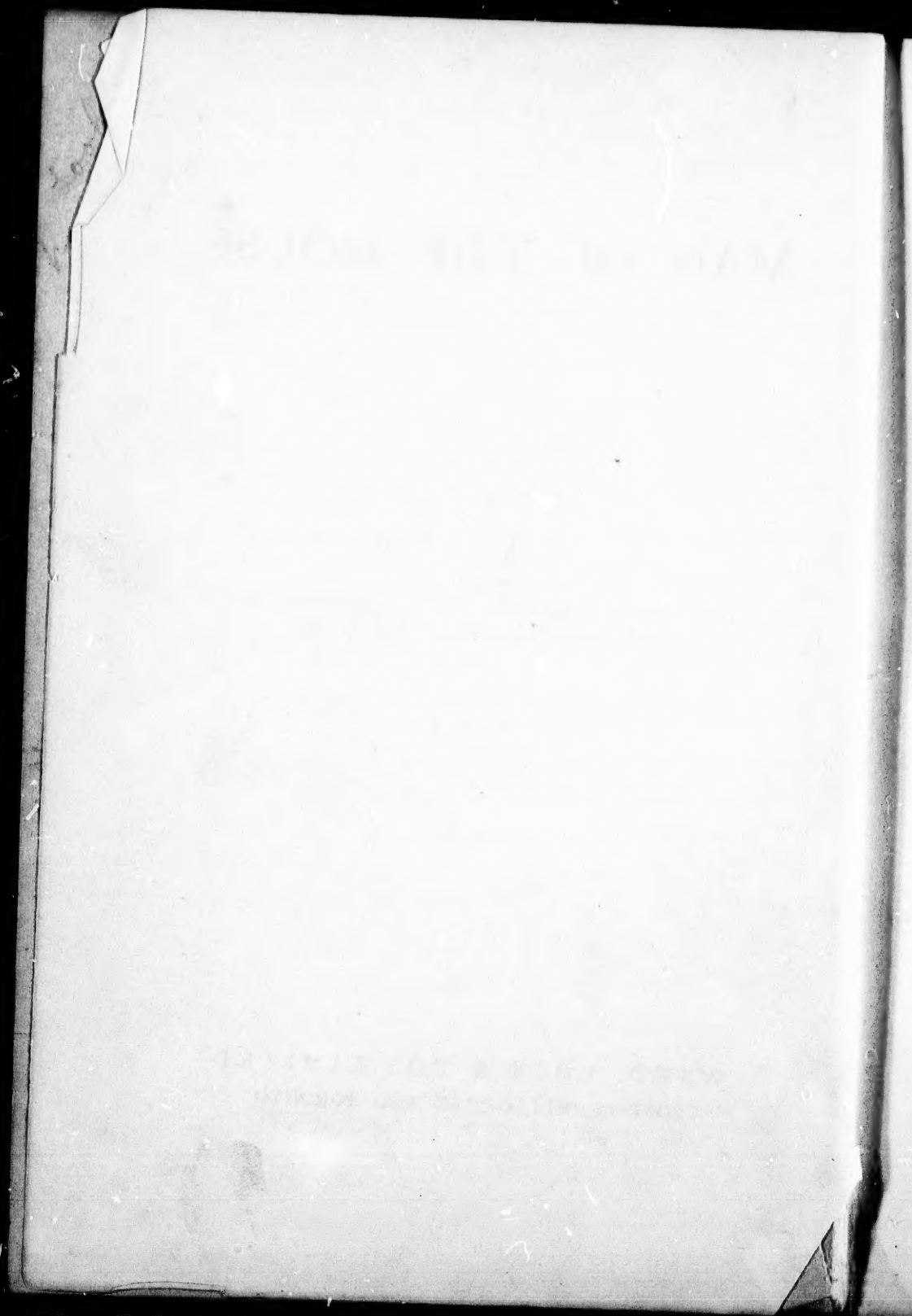
BY
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*"Four Girls at Chautauqua," "Links in Rebecca's Life,"
"Ester Ried," "The Pocket Measure," etc.*

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THE
MAN OF THE HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

HIS HOME.

It was a little bit of a room, dingy and dreary. I can't remember that there was a single bright thing in it. The sun only got a chance to look in for about five minutes, just before it went to bed at night; the rest of the time it was around on the other side of the house, where there wasn't a window, nor a chink that it could peep through. You want to know who lived in this house and stayed in this sunless room? Why Reuben Stone's mother and sister Beth. The sister's name was Elizabeth, but she was a little creature, and nobody ever spoke her full name. As for Reuben, being the man of the house, he was apt to be on the street from morning till night, trying to pick up odd jobs. School? Bless you! no, he didn't go to school; his jackets were out at the elbows, and his pants were out at the knees, and his shoes were

out at the toes, and in very cold weather he had nothing extra to wear around him except an old red and green plaid shawl of his mother's; he didn't like to wear that, because the boys shouted after him and called him "Dutchy." So in *very* cold weather he was apt to plan to do all his errands in the evening, when the boys wouldn't notice the shawl. Neither did Beth go to school, for much the same reasons that kept Reuben at home. Besides, she could help; her mother sat all day long, in that one low chair by that one window, and sewed as fast as she could, on boys' shirts for one of the wholesale stores in the city; and Beth could overhand some of the seams, and hem the edges, and take many stitches in the course of the day to help her mother; so as soon as their bit of housework was done—and you would have been astonished to see what a little time it took to do the housework—Beth would draw her chair as close to her mother's as she could get it, and they two would sew.

It was getting dark in the room; the sun had looked in, and said good-night to them, as if he were in too much of a hurry to stay even as long as usual, and the shadow of the big barn next to them was creeping further and further over the house. The fire was getting down, too; in fact, they always shut the dampers about the time the sun was expected, so as to save all the coal they could. Beth shivered, and drew her chair away from the window.

"Mother," she said, "sha'n't I open the damper,

and let the fire roar just a minute? It's *awful* cold here; my hands are blue."

Mrs. Stone looked up from her seam with a sigh.

"Yes," she said; "of course, it won't do to get cold; the next thing would be a doctor's bill. But we must be as careful as we can, for Reuben said this morning he didn't believe the coal would last until Saturday."

Beth opened the dampers and poked the dull coals a very little, then stooped down before the stove, warming her hands.

"I wish we could have something warm for supper to-night," she said. "Mother, do you remember it is Reuben's birthday?"

"Yes, I do," the mother said, shutting her lips tight; "I thought last week we *would* have something warm for his birthday. I meant to have roast potatoes and a little bit of cake; but I couldn't get those shirts done, you know, and so that plan had to be given up."

Beth drew a little sigh.

"I wish we weren't so awful poor!" she said, drearily; "just think! we can't even have baked potatoes for a treat once in a while! Isn't that horrid?"

"We have them for dinner quite often, you know," her mother reminded her.

"Oh, yes; I know. But I'd like, now and then, to have something for supper. Just bread and milk! Sometimes I'm ugly enough to be most sorry that Reuben gets a quart of milk a day for taking care of

that cow. If he didn't we'd *have* to have something else, now and then."

"I don't believe I'd take the trouble to quarrel with the only luxury we have," Mrs. Stone said, gravely; and Beth laughed, and began to clear off the little table, and put three plates and three cups on it.

"If you could have a cup of tea once in a while, I don't believe I'd mind about the rest so much," she said, after bustling about in silence for a few minutes.

"Oh, well, I do once in a while, you know. We had tea on Thanksgiving Day, and again on Christmas. What are you talking about?"

Beth tried to laugh again, but the mention of Christmas made her remember that the first day of the year was very near. "Just think!" she said, "to-morrow will be New Year's eve! I don't believe there is another family in this town who are not planning to go somewhere, or have company, or do something nice on New Year's. Mother, I can't help it; I think it is just *awful* to be so poor!" Mrs. Stone had no answer to this; sometimes it seemed hard to her not to know what her children would have next to eat, or whether they would have anything; but she had lived long enough to know that it would do no good to fret about it. Beth went about the room in silence after that, until the little table was set with its loaf of bread and pail of milk, then she found new cause for trouble. "Mother, what *do* you suppose can keep Reuben so? It is ever so much later than he generally comes."

CHAPTER II.

REUBEN'S QUARTER.

WHAT kept Reuben was this: it had been what he called one of his "unlucky" days. The errand-boys, and news-boys, and all other boys who had regular positions had been on hand, and nobody seemed to want anything carried anywhere, though the streets were full of people, with their arms full of bundles. It was getting near to sunset, the time when he generally went home to get orders about the errands for the night, and he had but five cents in his pocket. He knew just how much, or rather how little, flour, and coal, and potatoes there were in the house, and he knew that his mother had no money. He had hoped to have a grand day for business, and bring home at least twenty cents, and here it was, even worse than usual. Reuben Stone was ten years old, and rather a tall boy for his age; but he rubbed his worn-out jacket sleeve across his eyes, and made up his mind that this was a pretty hard world to live in. Generally, he managed to keep cheerful enough to whistle most of the time, but to-night he kept his lips shut tight, and trudged along with his head down.

"Halloo!" shouted a man from across the street.

Reuben looked up. A man with a horse and sleigh, standing in front of Parker's grocery, was beckoning to him. He clipped over the snowy road in haste.

"Do you know enough to hold a horse, my boy?" the gentleman asked him: a young gentleman with a pleasant face, and a wicked-looking horse he was trying to hold.

"I rather think I do, sir," Reuben said, cheerily.

"Well, then, attend to this one; he is hungry and cold, and determined to go home, before I am ready to have him."

Reuben took hold of the bridle, and the young man went into the store. What a hurry that horse was in, to be sure! He stepped forward a little, and, finding himself held, tried going backward; then he stood on his hind feet for a change; then he made plunges forward as though he were going to jump over Reuben and the carriage in front of him, and vanish. Reuben tugged at the bridle, and danced backward or forward according to the motions of the horse, but held on firmly, all the while giving the horse good bits of advice. "Come now, you don't get along any faster to pay for all that. Might as well stand still, and look about you, and take comfort. You will get home just as soon as you will to prance around in this way like an idiot. Oh, you can't go! You may jerk as hard as you like, and I sha'n't let go, not if I know myself; but you are a spunky fellow now, as ever I saw. My! ain't it getting cold, though! I don't wonder you dance: good way to keep warm. I guess that master of yours is going

to buy out the grocery and set up in business. Here he comes—good for him! *I'm* glad, and I guess you are!"

"Well," said the young man, "I made quite a stay of it, didn't I? And you and Spunk had lively times, I'll venture. Isn't that a good name for this troublesome fellow? Here's a quarter, my boy. It'll pay you well for your trouble. Go ahead, Spunk."

A quarter of a dollar for holding a horse a few minutes! Reuben considered that good pay. In fact he believed himself to be rich. It certainly wasn't often that he earned twenty-five cents in five or ten minutes' time. His eyes sparkled, and he rubbed his blue hands together in glee, as he slipped the quarter into his deepest pocket.

"If I were sure mother would like it," he said, talking to the kerb-stone, "I'd have a regular treat to-night. I'd get a quarter of a pound of tea, and some sugar, and maybe a bit of butter. That would make Beth open her eyes. But I don't know as I'd better, seeing we are most out of coal, and well, everything else, and that plaguy rent has got to be paid again so soon. When I'm a man there is one thing I won't do. I won't pay a cent of rent to anybody. People shall pay me rent, then. Won't that be jolly? Well, come on, Trotties, you and I had better run home. We're rich, we are! we've done well, to-day, and needn't work any more."

Whom do you suppose he was talking to, then? Nothing of less importance than his two feet! I

don't know, but almost as soon as he was born, certainly as soon as he could begin to talk, Reuben had let people know that he wanted a pony. There was nothing in life that he so much longed for, to this day. When he was a little bit of a fellow, just running alone, he played that his feet were a pair of ponies, that he was the owner and driver; and that they trotted with him, wherever he ordered them. This notion went with him all through his ten years of life; he didn't talk much about the ponies before people, nowadays, unless occasionally to mother and Beth. But the fancy pleased him all the same, made him feel less lonely, and the distance he had to travel some way seem less long. So he was in the habit of talking to them a great deal, and ordering them in a very horseman-like manner. "Come, Trotties, we are half a mile from home, and behind time; you must step up briskly. Let's take another look at the quarter, to be sure it is safe, and then we'll be off. If there should be a hole in that pocket!" He dived his hand down, felt carefully among the strings and bits of treasures, brought up the piece of money, and stepped under the glare of a street lamp that had just been lighted, stared hard at the money, rubbed his eyes, said, "What under the sun, moon, and stars does this mean!" looked again, turning it round and round, and over and over; then he said slowly, drawing a long breath before he spoke, "As sure as my name is Reuben Watson Stone, that fellow made a mistake, and this is a ten-dollar gold piece!"

CHAPTER III.

A RACE WITH "SPUNK."

FOR as much as two minutes Reuben stood staring at that ten-dollar gold piece, uncertain what to do. Not that he had the slightest temptation to keep the gold piece, provided he could find the owner. It is true he thought, "How jolly this would be to spend all for ourselves!" but then he had no more idea of spending it than he had of trying to fly. Reuben wasn't one of those boys who are honest simply because they have no temptation to steal. He would as soon have thought of going into the grocery and taking money from the drawer as he would have thought of putting that gold piece in his pocket without trying to find the owner. "We are honest, if we *are* poor," he had heard his mother say many a time, and he knew that he *was* honest. So, though he stood in doubt, it was all about how to find the owner of the gold piece. "I might as well try to find a needle in a haystack!" he muttered, as he turned the shining thing over. He knew almost nothing about haystacks, and I don't know that he ever hunted for a needle in his life, but he had often heard his mother use that expression when she was

having a hopeless search for something, so it came to mind now.

"That Spunk went like the wind. Where does he live, and how far is it? that is the question. He went up North Street, I know that much. Well, there is nothing for it but to try a race after him. So turn about, Trotties. Too bad! you want to go home, don't you? So do I, but there is no help for us; race along now, and see if we haven't got spunk enough to overtake that spunky little pony; maybe he has had to stop half a dozen times."

Away they went, Reuben and the Trotties, speeding up North Street; Reuben's eyes turning to the right and left as he ran, hoping to see the little brown horse standing before another store or house. Nothing of him to be seen. The Trotties slackened their speed after a little, and their owner began to have a hopeless feeling that he was having his race away from home for nothing. There were so many corners that the brown horse might have turned, or, if he had sped on his way, he was far beyond reach, resting composedly in some barn perhaps this very minute.

"We may as well go home, first as last," said Reuben, coming at last to a standstill. "What a stupid thing it was not to find out where that brown horse lived! He looked knowing enough to tell me, if I had asked him. How I wish I could find him. I hate to have ten dollars in the house that don't belong there, and not know where to take it. I don't believe I can ever find him, and it will be about a

dozen years before mother will let me spend it. Well, Trotties, shall we turn about and trot home? You don't know where the brown horse is, do you? Halloo! there he is this minute, just turning away from Dunlap's. Hold on there, mister, I say! Can't you wait?" and he was off in pursuit. But the brown horse was ahead and meant to keep so; though the Trotties did their best, he was, in a very few minutes, lost among a snarl of horses, and waggon, and street cars, and Reuben stood in front of Dunlap's store, rubbing his cold hands together, no wiser than he was before. A sudden thought came to him, and he dashed into the store to inquire the name of the man with the brown horse, describing him as well as he could.

"Don't know him," said the busy clerk, "stranger, I guess. How many pounds did you say?" This question was for the man he was waiting on, so Reuben turned and went out. Now he might surely go home with a clear conscience. He had done his best and failed.

"If he is a stranger," he told himself, "it's no ways likely that I'll ever find him, and mother might as well use the money first as last. If I could only make her think so, I'd go and pay that rent a whole quarter at a time. I'd like to know what the agent would think of that! I've a great mind to go pay him, and get his old receipt, and say nothing to mother about it, then I'd give it to her New Year's morning for a present. I wonder if there would be anything so very bad about that! I've half a mind

to do it. I could tell her all about it, afterwards. But I guess I won't; she don't like to be told about things afterwards, she likes beforehand better. Trotties, are you afraid you will freeze while I stand here planning? I don't know but you will, and your master too. Well, come on, let's go home. Halloo! Say, mister! Stop a minute!" he shouted at the top of his lungs, for the brown horse had been turned around and was speeding past him in the other direction. For a wonder, the young man heard the shout amid the din of other noises, and with some trouble checked Spunk's impatient feet.

"You made a mistake, sir," said Reuben, pressing close to the sleigh and speaking with difficulty, for Spunk was determined to step on him, or toss him in the air, or bite him, at least. "This is a shiner you gave me instead of a quarter."

"A what!"

"A shiner, sir—a ten-dollar gold piece."

"Is it possible I was so careless as that!" and he reached forth his hand, and Reuben dropped the shining thing into it.

"Well I declare! What a careless fellow I am getting to be! Good for you, my boy. If it had fallen into some hands, I should never have seen it again. Spunk, what is the matter with you to-night? You are worse than usual! Do go then, if you are in such a hurry."

And Spunk went, leaving Reuben standing staring after him. He stood perfectly still for a minute

or more, gazing after the flying horse. Then once more he spoke to the Trotties.

"Well, there is one thing I would like to know, and that is, who is going to pay us for standing out there in the snow and holding that horse for ten whole minutes?"

Nobody answered him, and he turned and walked gravely, and somewhat slowly, towards home.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT.

BETH flattened her nose against the window-pane and watched for Reuben, until it grew so dark that she could not tell one person from another ; then she wandered around the room, occasionally opening the door and peering out, letting in a great rush of cold air, and saying, every few minutes : " Mother, what *do* you suppose has become of Reuben ? " Mother had but little to say, but was almost as glad as Beth was when at last they heard his step.

" Why, where in the world ! " began Beth ; but her mother interrupted her.

" Why, Reuben, my boy, how cold and tired you look ! Where *have* you been ? "

" I've been to the end of the world, to the end of the city, or most to the end of North Street, anyhow ; " and he sat down wearily in a chair, and put the " Trotties " on the stove-hearth. " Those fellows are tired, you better believe, " he said, looking kindly down on them ; then, with Beth fluttering around him, and Mrs. Stone taking last stitches in the shirt she was trying to finish before supper, he told his story.

" Well ! I never—no, never in all my life ! " said

Beth, in great indignation, when he stopped for breath; "and so you had all that tramp and didn't get a cent."

"Not a cent," said Reuben, dolefully; he was too tired to be cheerful.

"Never mind," said the patient mother, "I dare say he was so astonished that he forgot it."

"Forgot it!" repeated Beth; "more like he wanted to save his money. I think he is just the meanest man I ever heard of. I hope I'll meet him and his old brown horse some day, and I'll stop him and tell him so."

"He looked like a nice man," said Reuben, who couldn't quite make up his mind to keep still and let Spunk's master be abused; "and I don't believe it was because he was mean, or else he wouldn't have given me a quarter in the first place; I never knew a boy to get more than a dime for holding a horse, and most always it is only five cents. That makes me think, I got five cents for taking care of Mr. Anson's horse a while this morning;" and he dived his hand into his pockets, brought out the lonesome five-cent piece, and, with a queer little smile, handed it to his mother.

"It is every cent that 'the man of the house' has earned to-day," he said, sadly.

"S'posing he had spent *that* for a cigar, instead of bringing it to his mother!" said Mrs. Stone, soothingly. "I know boys who never bring their mothers even five cents."

"Humph!" said Beth; but whether it was at the

thought of the cigar, or Spunk's master, or what, she didn't say. Then they sat down to supper. "There's one comfort," Beth said, "it hasn't gone and got cold while we were waiting." And at this, mother and Reuben had to laugh, so little by little they grew more cheerful.

"Well, Trotties," said Reuben, as soon as his bread and milk were gone, "you and I must trot out and tend to Dorcas; we aren't often so late. I don't know what she'll say to us."

"Dorcas" was the cow that furnished them with a quart of milk a day, and she lived in the stable that backed up against their one window. Reuben was very faithful to her, and was usually on hand to milk and take care of her, almost an hour earlier than it was to-night. So he hurried away; but much sooner than a cow can be milked, he came hurrying back.

"Mother, they've sold Dorcas!" he exclaimed, as soon as the door opened.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Stone; and she set down the big pan of water she was carrying, on a chair, and stood and looked at him. "When did they do that?"

"Just now: a man took her away less than an hour ago. Mr. Baker said it was a kind of a nuisance to keep a cow in the city anyhow, and she didn't give as much milk as she ought to, and boys were always bothering him about being late: wasn't that mean, mother? I haven't been late but twice since I took care of her; and the long and short of it is, she's gone!"

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Stone again. And the loss of that quart of milk a day was a great deal to her; she didn't see *how* they were going to get along without it. As for Beth, she felt almost guilty; hadn't she, that very afternoon, almost wished that they hadn't a quart of milk a day? Well, she had her wish for once.

Reuben presently came over to where the pan of water sat. "What do you want to do with this, mother?" he asked; and on being told, he went to the back door, and pitched it out into the darkness. It was natural for him to save his mother's steps. I think he was more careful about that than Beth was. The work was all done now, and they got around the little stand—this little family—much graver than usual. Reuben brought his book and slate, and tried to interest himself in an example in arithmetic. His mother encouraged him to try to keep on with his lessons, in the hope that some day he could go to school; but the world looked very dark to him to-night. The old year was almost gone, and the coal was almost gone, and Dorcas was quite gone.

"Come, children," Mrs. Stone said, after the ciphering and studying had gone on for some time in silence, "the fire is real low; it is time we were in bed. I'll just step in and see if Mother Perkins is comfortable for the night, and then we'll go."

"Mother Perkins" was an old and feeble woman, who lived all alone in one room of the house, and sometimes was unable to leave her bed for days together, and had to wait for chance callers to give her

something to eat. Mrs. Stone had taken her under her special care for the last few days, and went every night to see that she was made as comfortable as the dreary room would admit.

Reuben and Beth, thus left to themselves, stared at the dying coals in silence for a few minutes, then Beth said:

"What would you have bought with that quarter, s'posing it had been a quarter, and had belonged to you?"

"Well," said Reuben, meditatively, "I had more than two dozen plans. I guess if I'd done half with it that I thought about, it would have been just a wonderful quarter. You see, in the first place I wanted to get some coal, a whole bushel at once; we are dreadfully low on coal, I don't know how I am going to rake and scrape enough together to do till Saturday; then I wanted to get a quarter of a pound of real good tea for mother. It is regular hay stuff that she drinks now; I know by the way the clerk sneers at it as he does it up, and it is cheaper by pretty near a dollar on the pound than the real tea. Joe Bradley bought a pound of real tea for a Christmas present for his mother, and he paid ninety cents a pound! What do you think of that?"

"My!" said Beth, impressively. She knew how much a pound her mother's tea was.

"Well, then there was two or three things I kind o' wanted to get for you; I sha'n't tell you what they were, cause it's no ways likely I shall get around to them now, till I'm of age."

Reuben had always believed that when he was of age something wonderful would happen by which he could do for Beth some of the many things that he knew she would like. Just how he was going to get the money for all these things, he had not yet planned to his satisfaction ; but when a fellow was of age, he argued, of course he could get money.

"Oh, I don't care," said Beth, quickly ; " not about myself, you know. I'm sorry about the coal, and I should like first rate to have had mother had some real tea. I know hers that she has once in a while is of no account by the way it smells ; I smell the tea every once in a while when I go to Redwood to take the milk, you know. My ! how it smells."

"You won't smell it any more," said Reuben, shaking his head sorrowfully. "How he could go and sell that cow is more than I can think."

"The folks at Redwood will be sorry, too," said Beth ; "they liked that milk so much. The baby used to be out in the kitchen with his silver cup waiting for me to come, and he would just shout when he saw me."

"It won't make very much difference to them," Reuben said, shaking his head ; "folks that have got as much money as they have, it don't matter when a man sells his cow ; they can just go to another man and take out their pocket-books and say, 'Here I want some milk of you every day ; how much is to pay ?' Or, if it comes to that, they can up and buy a cow—two of them if they want to—just as easy as

they can turn their hand over. I tell you what it is, Beth, when I'm of age money is one of the things I'm going to have."

"How are you going to get it?" asked practical Beth.

"Yes, that's the question; that part of it isn't decided yet; but then you know I've got a good while to think it over."

And, with a gleam of fun in his bright dark eyes, Reuben arose, walked to the mantel, and proceeded to light the end of a candle which showed him the way to his "suite of rooms." This is what he always called them when he felt gay, in imitation of a lady for whom his mother sewed, and who was fond of describing to her sewing woman her grand house in the country. Reuben's "suite of rooms" had evidently been once a large old-fashioned pantry in two compartments, with a sliding door between. The house was an old-fashioned one, looking small enough now by the side of many larger ones that had sprung up around it; still, it had once been thought of good size, and several families lived in it now. But they were all families who could afford but one room apiece, or, at the very utmost, two. As Reuben lighted his candle, Beth, watching the process, was suddenly reminded of a bit of news that she had treasured up for Reuben.

"The south room is rented, Reuben."

"Is it?" the boy asked, turning around with an interested face; the pleasantest room in the house, with two large windows in it; standing vacant now

for several weeks, because no one came that way who could afford to pay for the sunshine that streamed in at those two south windows. You would be surprised to know how much difference that made in the rent. Reuben and Beth did not believe that sunshine was free; they had good reasons for knowing the contrary.

"Who's taken it?"

"A woman; kind of old, and not so very old either. She's got grey hair, and she is tall and straight, and her face looks sort of nice; not pretty, and not exactly pleasant as I know of, but the kind of face one likes. Anyhow, I like her chair; I just wish you could have seen it! The nicest chair, covered all over with bright queer-looking stuff; it couldn't have been calico; I never saw any calico like that—and it was so pretty. Reuben, it would be so nice if we could get mother a chair like that for a Christmas present."

"So it would be to get her a house, and a barn, and a cow," said Reuben, good-humouredly, "and about as easy, for all I see. Well, Beth, I must put the Trotties up for the night." And he took his bit of lighted candle, and went off to his clothes-press.

CHAPTER V.

MISS PRISCILLA HUNTER.

"GOOD-MORNING," said a very pleasant voice. It seemed to be speaking to Reuben Stone, though whose it was, or where it came from, he couldn't decide. He stood with his hands in his pockets, to keep them from freezing, looking about him to settle what to do first. He looked up and down, and across, and at last discovered the owner of the voice—a trim, kindly-faced woman, with her head reached out from the upper window—looking down at him.

"Did you think I was a snow-bird?" she asked him. Then, without waiting for his answer, "I suspect you are a neighbour of mine, and I thought I would introduce myself. I've just moved in. Don't you live in this house?"

"Yea'm," said Reuben, "I live in the north-corner room, second floor."

"Just so, and I live in the south-corner room, second floor; we are very near neighbours, you see. I wish you a happy last day of the year."

Reuben laughed, then looked grave. "I'm not likely to have a very happy one, as I can see," he said, and sighed a little in spite of his determination not to.

"Is that so? Now that's a pity. I always like to have a year end well, it makes such a good beginning for the new one. Suppose you *make* it end nice, whether it wants to or not?"

This made Reuben laugh again; her voice was so cheery that he could not help being rather cheered by it.

The brisk voice went on again; "Suppose you come up here, and show me how to unfasten the spring to my window, and tell me what is going to be the matter with your day?"

"I'll 'tend to the window," Reuben said, going briskly in, and mounting the stairs two at a time, "but as to what is going to be the matter with this day, I wish I knew." This last he said to himself.

The window fastening was turned without any trouble, and the window, when Reuben put his strong arms to it, went up as if by magic.

"See what it is to know how!" said his new friend, admiringly. "I suppose I fussed at that window for maybe ten minutes before I made up my mind to apply for help. Well, now, what is your objection to this day?"

"Why, I haven't any objection to it," Reuben said, laughing; "but it doesn't begin as though it liked me very well."

"What do you want of it?"

"I want it to give me some work to do."

"Work to do! Well, now, I never! Why the world is just as full of work as it can be. I

didn't know there was anything so easy to find as that."

"It keeps itself snug away from me, then," said Reuben, growing grim; "I've been looking for some these—well, ever so many days."

"And you haven't found any?"

"No'm; none to speak of."

"Well, that's just astonishing! it must be you are particular. What kind of work do you want?"

"No'm, I'm not the least bit particular; I'd take any kind of work that folks would pay for."

"Oh, you want pay, do you? That's another thing; though to be sure, I never knew anybody to work without pay, though they don't always think of the pay at the time."

"I have to think of it," said Reuben, stoutly; "I need it, you see; it isn't as though I worked for fun, or to get some spending money for myself. I do it to support the family."

"So you have a family on your hands, have you? How many? A father and mother, I suppose; any brothers and sisters?"

Reuben looked out of the window and waited a minute before he steadied his voice to say: "There's no father, ma'am; I'm the man of the house, and I have a mother and one sister to support. At least I want to support them, and mean to some time; mother has to work hard now, and so does Beth, but I don't mean it to be always so."

"Good for you," said his new acquaintance, looking at him approvingly. Meantime she had been at work

getting a fire started in her bright little cook-stove, and Reuben had lingered because it was such a bright pleasant room that he hated to go. How cheery it was to be sure. Not so very much larger than their own, but very different. In the first place, there was a carpet on the floor, only spread down, for the new-comer had moved in but the day before; but it was a warm-looking carpet, and would cover the entire floor nicely. Then there were already curtains up to the windows, white ones too; Reuben did not know that they were only the coarsest of maslin, costing but a few cents a yard, and would not have cared if he had. Also, there was a lounge, bright-covered, and a chair, which must have been the one that Beth had admired so much. There was a plant or two already seated on the low window, and the morning sun was getting ready to shine on them. South windows in this room, two of them; no wonder it was pleasant.

But the pleasantest feature of the room was that trim figure, filling the small shining tea-kettle with water. Reuben watched her admiringly, and knew now that she was very pretty; he had not discovered it at first; he could not have told now what there was about her that he liked so much; he only knew that he liked her. He sprang forward when the kettle was filled, and lifted it quickly and skilfully to its place on the little stove.

"Thank you," said his hostess, watching him with a satisfied air. "So you mean to support your mother and Beth? I shouldn't wonder if you would do it."

I kind of feel it in my bones that you will. I had a glimpse of Beth, I guess, yesterday. She is a nice, pleasant-looking little sister; looks as though she ought to be supported. How are you going to do it?"

"That's the rub," said Reuben, his face growing grave; "there seems to be nothing that a boy can find to do. Odd jobs, you see, don't pay. You take half your time standing around looking for them, and maybe half the time you don't find them."

"Just so; and then, according to that calculation, the whole of the time is gone. There's one thing though that is more important than to discover what you are going to do; that is, to decide what you are *not* going to do."

"I'm going to do *anything*," said Reuben, stoutly; "I don't care what it is; anything under the sun that folks will pay for, and I can do, I'm ready for. I picked out the kinds of work that I would like, for a good while, and hunted for them, but I gave that all up long ago. Now it is anything."

"I'm sorry to hear it," she said, gravely shaking her grey head, as she drew out a cunning little round table, and spread a white cloth on it. "I'm very sorry indeed to hear it; because I know of work that folks will pay for that if you were my boy I'd rather not be supported than to have you do."

"What, for instance?"

"Stealing, and lying, and killing folks, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh! Well of course I didn't mean that; folks don't get paid for doing those things."

"Don't they! There's where you're mistaken; they get paid in more ways than one. If you're talking about *money* pay, they get lots of that; I'm not sure but it appears to pay almost better in that way than any other business."

"But it's against the laws to do such things."

"Well, anybody with common sense would suppose so of course; but this is a queer world you know, and has queer laws; and I'm ashamed to have to own that you are mistaken: the law winks at the whole thing."

"Winks at stealing and murder!" exclaimed Reuben, beginning to feel that he had made the acquaintance of a lunatic. "I don't know what the laws are where you came from; but in New York State such things can't be done without folks suffering for them, if they are caught at it."

"Bless your heart, my boy, I wish that were true I've lived in New York State for seventeen years and seen the business going on all the time. I know men who have stolen houses, and horses, and cows, and furniture, and books, and I don't know what not, and murdered more wives and children than I can count, and the law hasn't peeped. Oh, yes it has, too; it has given every one of the creatures permission to keep on doing it, year after year."

"Oh," said Reuben, the look of astonishment passing from his face, "I know what you mean now. Yes, liquor-selling is mean enough business, I suppose; in fact I know it is. I should never do it for myself."

"For yourself? Oh no, of course not; but how would it be if you had a chance to do errands for a man who sold it? Carry home beer, or wine, or even stand behind the counter and sell the vile stuff by the glass?"

"Well," said Reuben, thoughtfully, "I've never looked for work in any of those places; but I suppose I'd take work if it were offered me. Might as well, you know; lots of boys stand ready to do it, and if I didn't take the place somebody else would. Yes, I'm in for work; I've got to work. You don't catch me refusing it; though I will risk my having such good luck as to have it offered me."

"I hope not," said his new friend in great gravity. "If those are your principles, I sincerely hope no one will lead you into temptation. You use just exactly the argument that might be used about stealing. Lots of folks stand all ready to steal, and I dare say a good deal of stealing will be done, whether you do it or not. Why shouldn't you have your share?"

"Oh, well, now," said Reuben, staring at her in great astonishment, "that's entirely different, you know. Maybe the very thing that I'd steal won't get stolen; but I know that every man who wants a clerk to sell his brandy and things can get one; so what difference does it make, whether it's me, or somebody else?"

"Look here," said the grey-eyed woman, laying down her knife and the loaf from which she was

cutting beautiful slices of bread, and facing around to Reuben, her eyes looking larger and greyer than they had before: "suppose that sister of yours—you love her, don't you?"

"I should rather think I did!" was Reuben's prompt answer.

"Well, now, suppose she had made up her mind to poison herself to-day, and was sure to do it, whether you helped her or whether you didn't, wouldn't it make a speck of difference to you, when you thought about it afterwards, whether it was you who mixed the poison for her and held it out to her, or whether it was somebody else?"

Over this question Reuben paused thoughtfully for a few seconds, then said, the colour rising slowly on his brown cheeks:

"Yes, ma'am, it would. I'd rather it would have been anybody else on this earth than me."

"Just so," said the grey-eyed woman, with an emphatic nod of her grey head. "Now, I'll tell you something; it's a thing that I don't like to tell very often, nor to think about. I had a father, and a brother, and a friend, who, every one, were poisoned to death with rum. *Murder*, I call it, though a good many people helped in it, and nobody was hung for it; but I'm glad that you wasn't one of the helpers; and I hope, with all my soul, that you will never lift your finger to help any other body's father or brother or friend to take poison."

To this appeal Reuben seemed to have no answer to make. The bread-cutting went on in silence for

a few seconds; then his new friend said, in a changed and cheery tone:

"Well, sir, I think it is time you and I introduced ourselves if we are to be neighbours and friends. I'm Miss Priscilla Hunter, a tailoress by trade, and I expect to make a great many vests and coats and pants for folks of about your size, or a trifle younger. Now, if you are the head of the family, what is your name and business?"

"I'm Reuben Watson Stone, and my business, you see, is to take care of my mother and sister, but I haven't found how to do it yet."

"You'll do it," with an emphatic nod of her head. 'I'll risk you. I shouldn't wonder if you should have a pretty good run of business this very day. Had your breakfast?"

"No'm," said Reuben, his cheeks growing hotter. Did she suppose he was going to tell her that they had but half a loaf of bread left, and he had saved it for mother and Beth, and started out intending to earn his own before he ate it? They were in closer quarters than usual just now, but he did not mean to tell anybody if he could help it. So he said, "No'm, I haven't eaten it yet."

"Pretty early, that's a fact," said Miss Hunter; "but seeing I was moving, I thought I'd be on hand early. If you are not in too great a hurry I wonder if you wouldn't buy some tacks for me, and a few shingle nails, and a tack-hammer—I broke mine taking the tacks out with the claw-end—and a spool of black linen thread while you are about it, and let

me pay you with a cup of coffee and a slice or two of my best toast?"

"I'll buy the things in a jiffy," said Reuben, his mouth watering at the thought of the hot coffee and toast. "But you needn't pay me; I'll do it to be neighbourly."

"Business is business," said Miss Hunter, briskly. "But never mind, we'll begin by being neighbourly; you sit down and have some breakfast with me, for my part, and then go do my errands for your part, and then we'll both be neighbourly and even. Don't you see?"

"No, ma'am," said Reuben, laughing. "I have to go right by the stores and can do your errands as well as not; and it isn't worth a cup of coffee and a piece of toast to do them."

"Not? Well, then, I'll have you get some buttons, and match a piece of cloth-lining for me at the trimming store on Broadway. Know where that is? All right; I'll be even with you, you see, somehow." All this time she had been dashing around her neat kitchen, putting two plates on the nice round table, putting her coffee to bubble—for the pint of water in the small bright tea-kettle boiled with a swiftness that would have astonished Beth—toasting her beautiful slices of bread, and in a wonderfully short space of time Reuben Watson Stone found himself seated at the nice round table, with its white table-cloth, taking a lovely breakfast with Miss Priscilla Hunter. He laughed while he ate, to think how all this would astonish Beth; and concluded that

she couldn't be more astonished about it than he was.

During the breakfast the talk went on. Reuben found himself telling Miss Hunter the most unexpected and astonishing things—how the cow was sold, and he wanted to send Beth to school but couldn't; had wanted to go himself, but had given that all up long ago. Wanted to buy his mother a house one of these days, wanted meantime to pay the next month's rent, and get a whole bushel of coal; but would fail even in these, if he got no work. "I'd like to buy my coal by the bushel, if I could," said this "head of the house," "because, you see, people who buy at wholesale get things cheaper, I have heard."

"Just so," said Miss Hunter, taking grave bites of her toast, and uncovering suddenly a mysterious little tin dish that she had lifted from the stove. "Look here, what a present I had yesterday from one of my old neighbours who lives in the country. She keeps a hen who lays eggs on purpose for me, and as soon as there are six of them, my neighbour brings them along." And she plumped a lovely white morsel just out of its creamy shell on Reuben's plate.

"Oh!" he said, breathless for a minute, then—"this is too much."

"One egg isn't much," said Miss Hunter, composedly. "I know a boy who used to eat two at every single breakfast." Which fact so astonished Reuben that he said not another word. But if there

had been any way of putting that egg into his pocket, or his hat, or somewhere, and slipping away with it nice and warm and white to his mother, how he would have liked it !

"So the cow is sold," said Miss Hunter, meditatively. "That's bad I suppose for the people who owned her, but I must say it makes my way look clearer ; you see I have a friend, about a mile away from here, who has milk brought to her from a farm in the country every morning, and I buy two quarts a day of her—I'm rather fond of milk—but the thing is, now that I've moved, to get it. She used to have her boy bring it to me on his way to school, but his way won't be down this street; now if I could find a boy or a girl who would like to tramp after it for me, and be paid in milk, a quart a day, don't you see I would be fixed ?"

"We could do that," said Reuben, eagerly, "Beth and I. She likes to take walks, and mother likes to have her, only she hasn't any regular place to go, and mother doesn't like to have her wandering about; but whenever it was nice and pleasant, she could get the milk, and when it stormed, or was too cold for a girl, I could go."

"Just so," said Miss Hunter, nodding her head. "Then we have so much fixed."

CHAPTER VI.

A WILD RIDE.

FROM the milk question they jumped—Reuben, in trying to tell it afterwards, could not remember how—to the chair that Beth had liked so much. His mother and sister, when they heard of it afterwards, thought it the strangest thing that he should have talked so to a stranger—and when Reuben came to think of it, he did not wonder; but at the time it seemed the most natural thing in the world for him to tell Miss Hunter how he had stood lighting his candle only the night before, when Beth told him about the south room being taken, and about the chair, and how she should like such a chair for mother.

"That chair," said Miss Hunter, turning her head and looking at it sidewise, while she poured a second cup of weak coffee, very much milked, for Reuben, and kept on talking, so that he, being a polite boy, of course could not say a word—"that chair has a history. You couldn't guess in a month where it came from. What would you think if I should tell you I found it in a cellar?"

"In a cellar!" repeated Reuben astonished, yet laughing. "Beth would say she would like to get into such a cellar as that."

"Well, that isn't the strangest part of it; what do you think of its being full of potatoes once?"

Then was Reuben soberly amazed, and listened in wide-eyed wonder to the story of a barrel that, by the help of a saw and a few nails and tacks, and a partly worn-out dress of Miss Hunter's, was made into a beautiful chair!

"You wouldn't believe what a comfortable seat it is," said Miss Hunter. "It wasn't such very hard work either. To be sure I had some trouble in getting it sawed out just right, you see I wasn't brought up to make chairs; but I got it after a while—folks can get most anything if they try hard enough. I shouldn't wonder if you and Beth would like to make your mother just such a chair some of these days; I'd be very glad to show you how."

Altogether, Reuben Watson Stone went down town that morning feeling that he had found a friend; the day looked brighter, his prospect for getting work seemed better. How much the cup of coffee, and nicely browned toast, and soft-boiled egg had to do with this feeling Reuben did not know, and I am not sure that I do.

The next thing to be done was to find work. He felt more eager for this than ever, for had he not just eaten a good breakfast, and had not his mother and Beth managed without even the milk which had pieced out their breakfast for so long?

"It is a wonder that toast and egg didn't choke me!" muttered Reuben, as with hands in his pockets he sped over the snowy ground; "I'd have given all

I'll earn to-day for the chance to slip it into my pocket and to run to mother; but *there*, I couldn't beg, and mother would have been the last one to have wanted me to; I *must* earn a dinner for my folks!"

There never was a meaner day for finding work. At least that was what Reuben thought. The people seemed bent on doing their own errands, tying their horses instead of wanting them held, and getting their papers of anybody but him.

"I'm glad it is the last day of the year," he growled, shivering, as he poised himself on one toe and looked in at the window of a large bakery, to discover whether a boy would be likely to be needed. Business was plenty there, but so were boys; they were flying around like tops. "Mean old year," said Reuben, as he moved on; "it is time you were done. When you can't furnish work in a great, big world like this for an honest boy who has a mother and sister to support, you better stand aside and let the new one come in.

"'Eighteen hundred and fifty-two is now for ever past.' I'll be glad when I can say that.

"'Eighteen hundred and fifty-three will fly away as fast.' That's the next line. Well, who cares? Let it fly. I'll risk it though; a year is an awful long time. Seems to me as though I must be about fifty, it was so long ago that I was ten! Halloo! What's that? 'Boy wanted to strip tobacco.' Strip tobacco! For my part I wish it was all stripped up and put in the Pacific Ocean. I think tobacco is most as bad as

whisky, anyhow, and Miss Hunter didn't say a word about it."

Notwithstanding his opinion he stopped at the store to see if he could get a chance to strip tobacco, but he was too late.

"Engaged a boy not ten minutes ago to fill the last vacancy." So the man behind the counter told him; and Reuben went out with a grave face, wondering whether, if he had not stopped to eat that lovely breakfast with Miss Hunter, he might not have been in time.

"But then, I was so hungry that like as not I would have disgraced myself by eating the strips of tobacco," he said, as he walked slowly away.

It was not lack of industry that he found little or nothing to do that morning. He travelled miles, stopped a great many men who looked as though they might have some work for him, looked in at a great many places of business, and inquired carefully at the points where he had to do errands for Miss Hunter. All to no purpose. Five cents for taking a letter half a mile up town for a lady: the five cents were to pay his car fare, but he saved it and trudged there; two cents for carrying a basket for another lady across the road to the street-car; one cent reward for picking up an old gentleman's handkerchief and rushing after him with it. This was the extent of Reuben's earnings when the short day was beginning to grow dusk. He had not been home to dinner; having left word in the morning that, unless he had an unusual run of luck, he should make a day

of it, and take dinner with his friends at the corner of South Street. These friends of his were an old woman and little girl, who sold penny buns, and molasses candy, and ginger snaps. Neither snaps nor candy did Reuben buy; he contented himself with one bun, because he had had such a good breakfast. This left him seven cents: he took them out and looked at them gravely. "I'm afraid," he said, shaking his head reproachfully at the dingy coppers, "I'm afraid that you will make a sorry show at paying the rent for a month, and laying in a stock of coal for a week, and getting a New Year's dinner for mother and Beth, besides a present or two to remember the day by."

Just then a card swinging from a window attracted his attention. "Hands Wanted," said the card, in large, black letters.

"How many, I wonder?" said Reuben, taking his out of his pockets and looking at them carefully. "I've got two: to be sure I want them myself, but then I'd be willing to lend them for decent work and good pay. I mean to try." And he pushed boldly in.

The grave-faced, middle-aged man who stood near the window, buttoning his coat ready to pass out, listened to Reuben's eager questions and shook his head. "It is women and girl hands that I am after," he said.

"Women and girls!" repeated Reuben, in dismay; "how old girls?" thinking of Beth, not that he meant her to go out to earn her living—he hated the thought of that; but then she was as eager to earn money as

he was himself, and it would be just as well for her to know she was too young, for of course she was.

"Oh, most any age that know how to work: fifteen, and twelve, and somewhere about there. I have hired them as young as eight, but that is almost too young; ten will do very well, if they are good, faithful girls, and want to work and earn money instead of play."

"Is it in a factory?" questioned Reuben, in terror; he did not know there was a place in that city where girls so young as Beth were hired to work; what if mother should think she ought to go? "I hope they don't get but a cent a week," he muttered, under his breath.

"Well, not exactly," the man answered. "There are factories, plenty of them, in town; but I was rather looking for women and girls who would like to take work home and do it; still, I could find them places enough in the shops, if they liked that better."

"It isn't in this city, then?" said Reuben, with a little feeling of relief, in spite of himself. Of course Beth could not go out of the city to work; still, to have work at home with mother was no more than she was doing now.

"Oh, no," the man said, it was west of the city, forty miles or so; nice village, people not huddled together as they were in the city; for his part he wouldn't live in the city if they would give him a house rent free.

"How much money could girls of ten earn in a day?" questioned Reuben, strangely fascinated by the new idea, although he had no more notion of Beth's ever being one of those girls than he had that he would be the President.

"Well, that depends on what kind of girls they are; whether they are quick-witted and industrious, you know, and all that. I've had girls working for us no older than that, who earned their seventy-five cents a day, day in and day out."

Then the blood in Reuben's body all came tumbling up into his face—at least he thought so—he was so astonished. Seventy-five cents a day! It seemed to him a fortune.

"Doing what?" he gasped.

"Nice work; gloves, kid ones, soft and pretty; putting rows of silk on the back of them. We used to have no trouble in getting hands, but the girls have all got such a notion of running the big machines, nowadays, that we are plagued to death to get those we can rely on. What interests you so much? Have you got a sister who would like to go down there into the country and earn her living?"

"I've got a sister," said Reuben, drawing his breath in hard, "but I don't want her to earn her living; I mean to earn it for her."

"You do, eh? Well, that's good talk; I hope you'll succeed. Do you live in the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does your father do for a living?"

"We haven't any father; I'm the man of the house, and have been for three years. Isn't there anything in your town for boys to do?"

The man shook his head. "Boys are plenty," he said, gravely, "as plenty as grasshoppers in August. They all want work too, or pretend they do; there's seven boys to every job in our town. Girls now are different, they all want to dress up and be ladies."

Reuben shook his head. "I'd like to earn seventy-five cents a day, first rate," he said, mournfully; "but I don't know as I'd like to have Beth pinned down to it; not if I can support them without it;" and he opened the door, and walked away.

"Nice appearing boy," said the man to himself, looking after Reuben; "but I dare say he'll go to smoking and drinking before he is anything but a boy." And with this hopeful view of Reuben's future, he turned away from the window and forgot all about him.

Reuben went up North Street wondering how they were getting on at home, wondering whether he must give it up and go home with only seven cents, when a horse dashed by him at full speed, the driver lashing him at every bound, seeming determined to make him run away if possible. "Ha!" said a man, stopping and looking after him; "Dick's drunk again! If he gets home alive, I'll wonder at it." At the same moment Reuben recognized Spunk.

Without having much idea why he did it, or indeed what he was doing, Reuben turned and ran

after the flying horse. I don't think he could have hoped to catch him, but he had a great desire to see more of Spunk. Sure enough, the young man drew up before a saloon with such a sudden jerk that he almost upset himself, threw the reins to a boy in waiting, and had disappeared inside the saloon before Reuben came. Several men were standing around, talking about the owner of the gay horse. "If he takes another glass in there, I wouldn't like to have to ensure his neck," said one.

"What a shame it is that he is bent on going to destruction in that fashion," said another; and still a third remarked that the man could hardly be blamed for doing what his father had done before him. Reuben, having nothing better to do just then, could not help stopping to pat Spunk's foamy coat and sympathize with him on having been so abused. Meantime, the talk went on about the danger that his owner was in if he should continue to drive in that reckless fashion. Just then the young man appeared, the flush on his face and the wild light in his eyes telling only too plainly that he had been drinking still more of the poison. "Aching for a ride—are you, youngster?" he shouted, as soon as his eyes rested on Reuben. "Well, jump in, and I'll 'rattle your bones over the stones,' in a way that you'll remember, I reckon. I declare I'm a poet! Who knew it?" And a wild, drunken laugh rang out on the air.

In a twinkling Reuben's resolution was taken; he

knew how to drive. Many a time had he jumped in with some of his market friends and managed their horses while they exchanged their vegetables for groceries; besides, he had often hopped on the omnibus that ran from the square to the Garden House, and the driver, who was a friend of his, would allow him to drive up to the hotel with a flourish. He would ride with this drunken man, who was in serious danger of breaking his neck; he would coax him to give Spunk into his hands, and by that means he would get the young man home in safety, and be paid well perhaps for his work. A wild way to earn money, certainly; and if Reuben had stopped to think twice, he would have remembered that his mother would hardly approve. Especially as he was well warned. "Don't get in, youngster!" "Don't go with him!" shouted one and another of the men; but it was all done in a minute, the shouting, and the jumping, and the laughing of the drunken man, and then they were off like the wind.

What a ride it was! Reuben will not be likely ever to forget it. Away, away over the rough, frozen roads; in some places the snow drifted badly, in some places the roads were almost bare. Where were they going? That was the question which at last began to trouble Reuben very seriously. He had not hold of the reins after all; his drunken companion held fast to them, shouting wildly, urging the horse to faster speed every minute, and was so crazy with the liquor and the excitement, that he

had long ago ceased to say anything that Reuben could understand. Still they flew along—the whip applied every minute to poor Spunk's foaming sides, the shouting growing wilder. They were away out of the city now, past all the fine houses, on a road that was new to Reuben, and was as lonely as it well could be.

There was a railroad-crossing! They were coming to it with all speed. And there! oh, horror! was the shrill scream of the locomotive. Reuben seized, or tried to seize the reins, and shout in his companion's ear, to let him know of the awful danger they were in. He might as well have shouted to the wind! What does a madman care about danger? On they went, he holding to the reins with a tighter grip than before, close to the track! The flagman waved ' signal, and the madman laughed and flew on over the ties, the sleigh groaning on the irons as they flew; and the hot breath of the engine was fairly in their mouths; but they were across, and alive, and still flying on! This dreadful death was spared them, at least, for a time; but what was to come next? How many more railroad-crossings might they not reach before this awful ride was over? Reuben thought of his mother and of Beth waiting for him, watching in the gathering darkness, growing every minute more frightened. He knew now that he ought to have thought of mother before, and not have put himself in this peril. He fancied he could see the little table set for three; it was New Year's eve, and maybe mother had been paid,

and had bought some little treat for a celebration ; maybe everything was ready and they were just waiting for him to come home and enjoy it ; and maybe he would never come ! Never see mother and Beth again.

He had been brave up to this moment, but now he struggled with the tears. He thought about trying to jump out, but the horse was flying so fast, and the sleigh was by no means an easy one to get out of, and his crazy companion had clutched him closely with one hand, ever since he dropped his whip in the snow. There seemed nothing to do but sit still, and let those great tears, that froze as fast as they fell, drop on his hands. If he had not been so awfully frightened, he would have known that he was suffering with the cold, and that there was another danger threatening him, that of freezing to death. But of this he did not even think. On they went, Reuben so absorbed in his fright and grief, that he did not at first realize that his drunken companion was growing less noisy, and was leaning his weight more heavily on him. Suddenly, however, he discovered it in a dangerous way ; the reins dropped from the driver's hands, he fell heavily forward in the bottom of the sleigh, and was in a drunken sleep. What would have given joy to Reuben's heart a little while before, now filled him with a new terror, for Spunk, trembling with pain and fright, feeling the reins fall loosely, was seized with a horrible fear that he was left to himself, and, with a fresh snort bounded on wilder than ever ; he needed no whip

now; without any doubt he was running away. For a few minutes Reuben gave himself up to uncontrolled terror, and cried aloud in his agony; no one to hear or heed. At least poor Reuben had never been taught much about the One who can hear, however far away we are from home and friends, and who is able and willing to help us. To be sure he knew about God; knew that He was the maker of all people and all things; knew that He took care of the great round earth, as it whirled on its journey day after day, and year after year. He knew that one named Jesus Christ had come to this earth a long time ago, and been nailed to a cross, and that for His sake people who belonged to Him were taken care of, and taken to heaven.

All this he would have told you he knew, if you had talked with him, and yet, after all, he knew it very much as he did that there was a country named China, away on the other side of the globe. Neither China nor Jesus had much to do with him; at least, he did not realize that the knowledge of the one was any more important to him than the knowledge of the other. Now, as his terror increased, something, he did not know what—and long afterwards he could not tell whether it was a voice or not that seemed to speak to him—seemed to say, "Why don't you ask God to help you? Nobody else can; you are away out on a strange road, there is no house to be seen, it is quite dark, and this horse is running away."

Whatever it was—whether a voice, or a thought put into his heart—it stopped Reuben's wailing cry; he took his hands down from his face, and while the horse flew wildly on, he clasped the hands, half-frozen as they were, and said: "O God, save me! tell me what to do!"

CHAPTER VII.

SPUNK'S HOME.

THEN he grasped the reins firmly in his half-frozen hands, and gave all his strength to the stopping of that flying horse. It was no easy task : Spunk had not the slightest notion of stopping, he had evidently not yet thought of being tired ; but the road was growing smoother, and someway Reuben felt less frightened with the drunken man asleep beside him than he had while the muttering was going on. He sat up straight, and tugged hard at the reins, and let himself be whisked over the snowy ground, and tried to calculate how far they had travelled, and felt that someway, whatever the reason, he was not trembling as he had been, and his hope of some time reaching home alive began to revive. On they went ! Spunk seemed somewhat less frightened now, and inclined to enter into the fun of the thing, and run away just because he had thought of it, and had a good chance. There was no danger of *his* freezing : indeed, cold as the night was, his brown coat was steaming. At last —Reuben did not know how long after the first let up of his terror, but some time during that wild ride —it became plain to him that Spunk had given up

the idea of getting entirely away from everybody, and was quieting into a steady, rapid gait.

"I wonder if he would bear turning around?" Reuben said to himself; "this road is wide enough to turn comfortably, and it seems to me it is about time we were travelling towards home. Maybe, though, he would kick up his heels, and be off again like the wind, if I should attempt it. Well, what if he should? The faster he went, the quicker we would get back to the city, and I suppose we've got to go back there. I wonder where he lives, anyhow? Spunk, what do you say? Will you behave like a lunatic if I turn around?"

Nobody answered; Reuben was in great doubt what to do. He thought of his prayers; he was not nearly so frightened; he believed in his heart that some of the terror died out just as he spoke those words to God. Maybe God would tell him what to do? How did He tell people, Reuben wondered. It couldn't be that He spoke to them, so that they really heard words! Reuben had been to church a good many times in his life, and to Sunday-school; he had heard a good many prayers, but no answers. "Perhaps only the people who are praying in their hearts hear the answers," said Reuben to himself; and he at once had to own that he didn't believe he had ever prayed in his heart until a little while ago.

"I didn't hear any answer, though," he said, aloud. "Hold on! Yes I did, too! I *felt* an answer; I guess that's just as good."

So then, without letting go of the reins, he spoke the words out distinctly in the solemn night, feeling only too sure that none but God could hear him. "Oh, God! tell me just what to do."

Was he answered? Did he *feel* an answer? He asked himself that question, and so interested and strangely solemnized was he with the thought that God and he were having a talk together, that every bit of fear went out of his heart. After a few moments more of steady progress, Spunk dropping into quieter ways with every step, Reuben, watching his road, suddenly drew skilfully off toward the right, and intimated plainly to Spunk that he wanted to go back over the same road he had come. Spunk made not the slightest objection; on the contrary, he whisked the sleigh around with such suddenness as to almost take Reuben's breath away, and was off! Not in any wild fashion, though; just a steady, business-like trot. Now all this matter had taken a good deal of time, and Reuben knew perfectly well that a good many miles must have been gone over.

"You went like the wind, old fellow, when you came this way," he told Spunk; "and you're not going back so fast by a good deal, I'm happy to say; I'd rather go slower, and be sure of my bones. But it will take us a good while to get home, if we ever do, and I believe we will: at least *I* shall; I wish you could tell me where your home is, Spunk."

All the while he talked thus cheerily to the horse, his heart was full of a little gleeful song. He felt

perfectly certain that the great God Himself had actually bent His ear and heard his—Reuben Stone's—words, and directed his steps!

"What else could it be?" said Reuben, talking aloud. "You see, one minute I didn't have the least kind of a notion what it was best to do: whether to go on, or try to turn around, or *what*; my mind was all in a muddle, and there was nothing around here that a fellow could see to help me make up my mind; then, all of a sudden, it seemed to me just as clear as day that the thing to do was to turn right around, and something seemed to say to me that Spunk would behave himself and trot back towards home; and I did it, and he *does*. Yes, *sir*, I believe that I got some help from somewhere, and I should like to have anybody tell me who could have helped me but the One I asked."

Now, if Reuben had lived a little later in life, and became acquainted with a man named Robert Ingersoll, and had asked him this question, there is no knowing what nonsense he might have been told in answer. But having the good fortune to live a thousand miles away from that foolish man, among people who had common sense, he never thought of imagining that there could be an effect without a cause. In the course of time—and it seemed a long time to Reuben—the railroad track over which they had flown in such fury was reached; at least its rails could be seen in the distance. And there, sure enough, was the snort of the engine, and the roar of the coming train! The boy's heart beat fast now. What was

he to do? It was not possible to cross the track before the cars would be upon them, and what if Spunk insisted upon going on, faster and faster? It had all to be settled in a second. Of course the thing to do was to try to stop Spunk. He did not have to hesitate over that. To his intense relief, Spunk made not the slightest objection to stopping; on the contrary, seemed to think it a wise idea. Whether he was not, in his sensible moments, afraid of the cars, or whether he was just then too tired and sleepy to think about them, Reuben did not know; but certain it was that he stood perfectly still, not even winking, so far as could be seen, while the fiery-eyed monster thundered by. Reuben gave a sigh of relief when the last great danger, that he knew of, on their way was past, and, stooping down, drew the great furry robes more closely over his sleeping companion. "I call that sensible of you, Spunk," he said, in admiration, to the horse, as that animal obeyed a gentle hint with the reins and trotted on. "And I call it very kind indeed in the One who is taking care of us." Reuben spoke the words reverently; it was all new business to him, this night's work; he did not know how to express his gratitude to the great God, in the words that most people would have used, but he felt it very deeply. A long steady pull now in silence, and by the widening road and certain other signs Reuben judged that they must be nearing the outskirts of the city. He slackened his hold on the reins slightly, and gave himself up to wonderment as to what he should do when he reached North

Street. "Seems as though I'd got to do a little planning now," he said aloud; "I've been taken care of so far; but now we are getting to the city I ought to know something about which way I want to go, but I don't. Suppose I go home; I'm as good as three miles from there likely enough; mother and Beth are pretty near scared to death about me by this time, it's likely; and they would be *quite*, if I appeared in such company. Then how would I get him in? I couldn't leave him outside all night, he'd freeze, and it wouldn't do, anyhow; but I couldn't lift him in, and mother oughtn't to help; and what would I do with the horse? It's just as much of a muddle as ever, for all I see. I can't plan!" But behold, just at this point, who should assert his right to plan but Spunk himself! He glanced around to see if all was quiet in the rear, then, having reached a turn in the road, he suddenly whisked around the corner with the briskness of a kitten, and quickened his speed almost into a gallop, so glad did he seem over having his own way.

"Well, I never!" said Reuben, rubbing his eyes with his unoccupied hand; "where are we now? What road is this, I wonder, and what did you whisk us into it in this style for?"

Something in the impatient snort that Spunk gave in answer to all these questions led Reuben, who had watched horses a good deal, to conclude that this spunky little fellow knew more about things than he had been planning for; in short, knew the way home and was going there as fast as his four legs could

take him. "I never once thought of that!" said Reuben, delighted at the turn affairs had taken; "I shouldn't wonder if he would take this awful-acting old fellow right straight home, and it is to be hoped there will be somebody to lift him out and put him to bed. Well, Spunk, go ahead. Somebody is taking care of us to-night who knows how to do it, and we'll get safely out of the worst scrape we ever had in our lives, I verily believe. You've got good taste, anyhow, old fellow; this is as wide and nice a road as I ever saw, and there are some splendid-looking houses along here; since you've taken matters into your own hands—or rather feet—I hope you'll pick out a nice one for us to stop at. Seems to me I've had about ride enough for one night." As if mindful of this last bit of advice, Spunk, with a neigh of satisfaction, presently whisked into an elm-lined avenue, which wound in and out among great trees, in a fashion that in summer must have been perfectly delightful, and drew up presently before a flight of steps that led to one of the finest houses Reuben had ever seen—at least this was what he thought about it afterwards. There was little time to bestow upon houses just then, he was so occupied in wondering what would happen to them next. Almost before Spunk had fairly stopped, the door opened, letting out a flood of light over the snowy world, and a woman's form appeared on the piazza, a low, anxious voice asking, "Edward, is that you?"

Now Reuben for a moment was silent, in doubt

what to say; he did not know whether it was Edward or not; and he had no way of finding out, unless this woman could help him. She stepped nearer. "Spunk!" she said, anxiously, "is it Spunk?"

"Yes'm," said Reuben, promptly; of that much he was certain. "It is Spunk, and he insisted on coming here, so I thought I would let him come, and see if it was all right."

Then the woman came entirely down the steps into the snow.

"What has happened?" she asked, in a voice which though excited was low, as of one who was often obliged to keep troublesome things to herself. "Who are you? And where is Spunk's master?"

Reuben had a faint idea that Spunk had been his own master for a long time, but he hurried to explain. "I'm Reuben Watson Stone, ma'am; Spunk's master offered me a ride, and Spunk got wild and ran away, and his master went to sleep. He's all safe, I guess; I kept him tucked up as much as I could, but he's as sound asleep as a nut."

"Asleep!" repeated the lady, and her tone was full of horror and dismay.

Reuben felt sure that she knew, without any other explanation, just what was the matter with him.

"Wait," she said, "I'll get a lantern;" and she glided into the house. Back again in a few minutes, with a lantern, which she set down in a sheltered place on the piazza; then she came close to the sleigh.

"Boy," she said, still speaking in that low tone;

"are you strong? Do you suppose that you and I could get him into the house and to his room without any other help? There is no man in the house but Mike, the new servant, and I don't like him, and don't want to trust him to see Edward sick in this way. He is sick, of course, or he would never have gone to sleep when the horse was running." And she turned and tried to look sharply into Reuben's face.

"Yes'm," said Reuben, simply; "I'm strong, I think we can manage it;" and he felt as if there was the strength of a young lion in his little body just then!

He was so sorry for the lady! He wondered if "Edward" was her son, and what *his* mother would do if her son should ever come home in such a fashion. "I never will! never, *never!*" he said to himself, and set his teeth hard.

Then he hopped down like a squirrel and began tugging at the stupid lump which had slipped to the floor of the sleigh. How heavy he was! Yet he was a very slightly built young man; Reuben wondered how he could be so hard to lift. The mother—if it was his mother—tugged with all her might. Fortunately the bottom of the sleigh was about on a level with the broad piazza, so, after much puffing and panting, they had the sleeping mass pulled well across the piazza inside the brightly lighted room, Spunk standing still and looking on with as much quiet patience as though he had never thought of dancing or running.

"Now, do you think we could get him on this bed?" the lady asked, and she threw open a door leading into paradise—at least it looked somewhat so to the cold tired boy.

He took in the picture almost without knowing that he saw it: a great, beautiful room, with rich crimson curtains at the windows, dropping in a glowing mass to the very floor. A large, beautifully carved bedstead, made up in spotless white; a great crimson-covered easy-chair—the crimson of the same strange brightness of the carpet, which made him think of the woods aflame with red-gold leaves in autumn—and two mirrors turning around whenever he did, and making three or four of him in different corners of the room! At least this was the way that Reuben's fascinated eyes took it in, during the moment that he stood staring. Then he said:

"Yes'm, I guess we can," and turned towards that senseless fellow on the floor.

"How very small you are!" said the lady in surprise, seeming to look really at him for the first time. "I don't believe you can possibly lift him; why, you must be *very* young."

"I'm going on eleven, ma'am," said Reuben, drawing himself up, and looking as tall as he could. There seemed no need to tell her that, but the day before had been his tenth birthday!

Then he stooped to prove his lifting powers; the lady came to help him, and though he told himself that if she had been *his* mother he would never let her lift like that, and though he declared to himself

that that beautiful white bed, fit for a prince, was no place for such a lump as this ! still they put him there, he helping only by turning over just when he ought to have kept still, thereby nearly pitching himself out of bed, and muttering something about being let alone.

Oh, such a sigh as that poor mother gave when it was finally accomplished, and she stood looking at him ! It went to Reuben's heart, and fixed certain resolves which had been growing stronger every minute for the last few hours. What was to be done next ? The strange lady acted as though she had already forgotten him, and stood with such an utterly mournful gaze fixed on her son that Reuben could hardly bear to see it.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, ma'am ?" he asked at last, and she started and turned towards him.

"You poor boy !" she said, pityingly, "how tired you look ! Where do you live ?" And when he had told her, she declared promptly that he must not think of going home. "It is more than three miles from here, and it is after midnight now ; you are too cold and tired to *think* of going ; it would be dangerous—you might freeze to death. Do you think I could let you go ? I suppose you have saved my poor Edward's life. Boy, do you know what is the matter with him ?"

"Yes'm," said Reuben, simply. What else could he say ?

"And have you a mother ?"

"Yes'm, I have; I'm her only son, the man of the house, and I ought to be home this minute; she will be scared to death."

"It won't kill her; I have waited for my Edward until morning many a time. You can make her heart glad over the whole story to-morrow. Look here, Reuben—did you say your name was Reuben?—well, do you *never* go home to your mother as my only son has come home to me to-night!"

"No, ma'am," said Reuben, solemnly, "I never will." Then he gave his attention to business. "What about Spunk, ma'am? He ought not to stand out there like this, after such a trip as he has had."

"True enough," said the lady with another great sigh; "I had forgotten the poor beast. I suppose I must try to rouse Mike to take care of him."

Whoever "Mike" was, she evidently disliked him, and dreaded so much to call him on the scene, that Reuben said:

"If you would like, ma'am, I think I can fix Spunk out all right for the rest of the night; we are pretty well acquainted—ought to be by this time."

"Are you sure you are not afraid of him?" the lady asked, anxiously.

"Not a bit, ma'am;" and as he slung the lantern on his arm and went in search of the barn, he said to Spunk: "Do you suppose I intend to be afraid of you, or most anything else, old fellow, after to-night?"

Much troubled was Reuben about his mother and Beth. While he was putting Spunk to bed, he felt so wide awake and ready for anything that he told himself he meant to go "right, straight home;" but the lady was watching for him when he came back, and opened the door, and then opened another door and pointed upstairs, and told him to go right up and go to bed; he would find everything comfortable for him. And by this time, the excitement in which he had been living so long having cooled down, the warm room and the stillness, and the thought of a bed made the poor ten-year-old boy feel so very tired that he knew that he could not make his feet drag over the frozen distance between him and mother.

"I guess I shall have to give it up," he said, wearily; "I meant to go home, so mother wouldn't be scared all night; but I'm afraid I couldn't get there."

"Of course you couldn't," his hostess told him, promptly; "it would be just committing suicide to try it. Go right upstairs and get to rest; in the morning bright and early you can make it all right with mother. If I had anybody to send I would let her know this minute that you are safe; but we have just lost our faithful hired man, and this Mike is a new servant, and"—she came closer and spoke low—"I think he drinks; indeed, I am sure he had been drinking to-night when he came home, and I am afraid of him."

"Ugh!" said Reuben aloud, when he got safely

into the upstairs room. "Two drunkards! I ought to stay all night to take care of her. Reuben Watson Stone, if you needed a temperance lecture, I think you have had one to-night."

"Hail, Columbia!" this remark followed an amazed stare which he took around the beautiful room into which he had been directed. Soft carpet, soft curtains, soft bed, bright fire, bright gaslight! Reuben had never in his life been alone in such a room before. For fully five minutes he wandered up and down, examining, admiring, delighting his eyes with a sight of all the beauty, trying to charge his memory with the details, in order that he might describe it all to Beth. Then the tears suddenly gathered in his eyes as he thought of Beth watching, waiting, crying; of his mother growing pale with watching and fear.

"I oughtn't to have stayed!" he said, remorsefully; "I ought to have gone right straight home, even if I most froze."

At that moment his eyes rested on a little stand which was carefully covered over with a napkin showing irregular mounds of something underneath. He raised the napkin curiously: bread and butter, and the wing and the leg of a chicken, and a piece of frosted cake, and a dish of canned strawberries! Then Reuben discovered that he was hungry. Why not? When was it that he had that breakfast with Miss Hunter? "Seems three days ago, at the very least," he muttered, and he felt in his pockets for the packages she had sent by him to get. Yes.

they were safe. "She'll think I went to Greenland to get 'em," he chuckled; "and I did most."

Tears and laughter were both very easy for Reuben to-night. He fell to eating the bread and butter, and decided that not even Miss Hunter's was quite equal to it. While he ate he pulled off his boots, and decided that his feet were *very* tired. Presently the jacket was thrown aside, and in less time than it takes me to tell it, he was in the middle of that nice bed. He had decided to rest himself just a little while, and then get up and slip away home. He would not go to sleep at all, he told himself, for fear he should not be able to waken in a few minutes. But the bed was so soft and the room was so warm and bright, and his head and feet and arms and hands were so very, very tired! He had just time to say to himself:

"What a lovely, *lovely* bed this is? If I *should* go to sleep I don't believe I could wake up again;" and then that was the last he knew of himself for hours and hours.

CHAPTER VIII.

TEMPTATION RESISTED.

THE next thing that Reuben knew, the sun was shining directly into his eyes. He sat up straight and looked around. "Halloo!" he said, utmost amazement in his face, "what's all this? Who am I, and how did I get here? Beth!" But of course Beth, being three miles away, didn't answer. "This is the biggest dream I ever had!" he said. Then memory began to wake up, and take him back over that long wild ride of the night before. "I declare it's morning!" he said at last, much astonished; "and here I am in bed, instead of being at home." Whereupon he hopped out to the middle of the floor, and began to dress in haste. His plan was to slip out and away, and get home before the people in this grand house would know anything about it. But the sad-faced mother downstairs did not intend any such thing. He opened his door very softly, but she also opened one on the opposite side of the hall, and smiled a good-morning. "I want you to come in and take some breakfast with me," she said, as they went down the wide staircase together, "and after that, my son would like to see you for a few minutes."

"I ought to get home just as fast as my feet will take me," declared Reuben, dismayed at this new delay. "I meant to go last night, after I had rested a little bit; but I got asleep. I don't know how I came to do it, and I don't know what mother will think."

"She will think you did just right when you tell her about it," the lady said, smiling; "you see if she don't. It will not take you long to eat some breakfast, and by that time the South-side cars will begin to run, and they will take you faster than your feet."

"Yes'm," said Reuben, "but my feet will do it cheaper." But he followed her into the elegant dining-room; there did not seem to be anything else that he could do, just then. As he did so, the memory of his breakfast the morning before flashed over him. "I declare! I take my breakfasts out nowadays," he said to himself, laughing over the queerness of it all. This was a very different dining-room from Miss Hunter's. It was handsomely furnished, and the table was set with silver and china, and gleamed with a dozen pretty things of which Reuben did not know the name. It was set for two, and Reuben presently found himself seated opposite the pale lady, and waited on, by a deft servant, to steak and toast and coffee and canned fruit and griddle cakes and maple syrup and, well—a number of other dishes with which he was unacquainted. Never had he taken breakfast in such style before. Indeed, I may say he had never expected to be sur-

rounded by such elegance ; but, looking around on it all, it took him but a second to decide that he liked it, and in about one second more he had resolved on having his dining-room furnished in just this way when he became a man.

"So you are the man of the house?" said his hostess, as if being able to see his thoughts.

"Yes'm," he said, blushing over the thought of what she would say could she know how he was planning to furnish his house. "I have a mother and sister to support. I haven't been able to do it yet ; mother has to work, and so does Beth ; but then I help, and one of these days I expect to do it all."

"I believe you will," she said, looking at him earnestly. It was much the same words that Miss Priscilla Hunter had spoken to him the morning before. It was certainly very encouraging to find that these two women neither laughed at him, nor were doubtful about it ; they evidently believed in him. I can't say that he enjoyed this breakfast quite so much as the one in Miss Hunter's south room. The truth was he felt a little embarrassed by the largeness of his napkin, and the weight of his silver fork, and the careful attention of the servant. Still he managed to eat quite a hearty breakfast, in haste though he was, for of course it would not do to go until Spunk's master, or rather Spunk's owner, saw him, since he wanted to do so.

The grave-faced lady was very pleasant, and was very much interested in his mother and Beth. About

the latter, especially, she asked many questions, as to her age, size, appearance, and the like. And Reuben, who thought his sister was a beauty, had no objection to describing her; so the conversation went on nicely. At last the lady arose from the table, and said, "Now we will go in and see Edward a moment." Through the hall, across another room, large and elegant, into the same bright spot where he had landed the night before. Edward was still in the bed where he had been rolled and tumbled by Reuben himself; but all trace of disorder had disappeared. He was awake and himself; though very pale, with heavy rings of black under his eyes.

"Well, my boy," he said, as Reuben stood in the door and waited, "I hear that you and Spunk had a time of it last night. Ran away, did he? the scamp! I remember something about his being restive, but one of my hard headaches came on in the afternoon, and I was soon beyond having much idea of what was going on. How came you to be with me, my boy? I don't remember."

"You asked me to ride, sir," said Reuben, "and I remembered Spunk, and thought I would like a ride with him."

"You remembered Spunk!"

"Yes, sir; I held him for you one day, and you gave me a shiner by mistake."

"Ah, yes; and you ran back to me with it. I remember your face now; I thought it looked

familiar. Well, let me see, didn't you finally scud off before I paid you? Or didn't I go off? How was it? Anyway, I don't believe you got any pay; that was a regular cheat, wasn't it? Well, we must try and make it right. How far did you travel last night?"

Reuben, as well as he could, described the route and the plan of getting home, Mr. Edward occasionally interrupting him to say, "Is it possible!"

"I declare!" he said, when the story was finished, "you are a plucky fellow; very few strangers can manage Spunk, though he is well-behaved generally, too. Well, I owe you a great deal of thanks for your skill and good sense. Now, what else do you need beside thanks? Mother tells me you have a family to support."

"Yes, sir," said Reuben, gravely: "a mother and sister."

"Pretty heavy burden at your age; what do you do for a living?"

"Hold horses, and all such things," said Reuben, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Then you have no regular employment."

"Yes, sir: my regular employment all winter has been to look for steady work; but I haven't found it yet."

His questioner interrupted him to laugh heartily; and then said: "I'm disposed to think I can help you in that business. Are you particular as to what you do?"

"I am if I can get it to do ; I've tried for the particular things first, and stood ready to take the others, if the particular ones didn't come along."

"I see. Well, mother, don't you believe this chap is just the one they need down at St. Mark's?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if he would suit them," the lady said.

"I think he will. I'll recommend you, my boy, and you will be pretty sure to secure the place if I do. I have some authority there. It will be a good place, steady work, and good wages. You can begin to support that family of yours on a better plan than you have been doing lately."

"What is St. Mark's, if you please?" asked Reuben, his sparkling eyes saying "thank you" for him with every twinkle.

"Well, it's a wine parlour, one of the best in the city ; a sort of cash boy you would be, and waiter in general ; I hardly know what your duties would be ; but I know the work is not hard, and the pay is good."

Then did all the sparkle go out of Reuben's eyes. There stalked up before him the memory of his resolution, not only, but his positive promise, made but the night before. "I'm very sorry," he began, with a red face, "that is, I mean—I think—" and he paused in great confusion.

Well, what's the trouble? You need not fear not being able to suit them ; you are just the quick-witted chap that they need, and I suppose I may as well say that you shall have the place, though I don't

meddle with their hired help as a rule; I'll make this an exception."

"I thank you," stammered Reuben; "but if you please I would rather not; that is—well, you see, sir"—and having resolved to speak out, he held up his head and spoke boldly—"the fact is, I have made a pledge never to work for *rum* in any shape—sell it, or drink it, or help other folks to drink it; and so I can't go; though I'm much obliged to you for the chance."

"Upon my word and honour!" said the owner of Spunk, rising slowly on one elbow and staring at Reuben as though he were a curiosity. "You are really the coolest chap I ever came across. So you won't take the place, eh? Very well; of course, if your wish for regular work is all a humbug, why, you can afford to throw away chances like this. I supposed you were really in earnest. Then I don't know of anything that I can do for you. Mother, I guess you may as well let him go. He is simply impudent, and that is the most there is of him." And the gentleman slowly let himself down from his elbow, and turned over and shut his eyes. Reuben did not speak at all. If he had had anything to say, he couldn't have said it then. His voice was choked with tears. It was a great and sore disappointment; to be so near to regular work and good wages, and then to have to see them slip away from him was too much. He turned away, and wiped two great tears from his eyes with his threadbare jacket-sleeve.

"I am afraid you have been very foolish," the pale lady said, speaking sadly; "Edward had taken a fancy to you, and would have done well by you. He owns the saloon. People *will* sell liquor, you know, and people will buy it; you might as well earn your living that way as in any other. Because you work in a wine parlour is no reason why you should drink liquor, you know. I hope you will *never* do that; but you must not throw away your chances to help your mother for the sake of mere notions."

Poor Reuben! The tears were dropping rapidly now, and he was *so* ashamed of them, and *so* angry about them, and *so* disappointed about Spunk's master.

"Never mind," the lady said kindly, seeing the tears. "I am very grateful to you for all that you did last night; so is Edward: he is a little vexed now, for you must remember that you were rather rude to him, though I know you did not mean to be. He will get over it; and when you have had time to think about this, and change your mind, come and see me, and I think I can still secure the place for you; that is, if you are not too slow: but I think you are one who does things in a hurry. Meantime, I want you to take this basket that I have packed to your mother, with my love; and in this paper is something to help you support your family. Here is a street-car ticket; you take the Blue line on the South side, you know." And Reuben, still in a maze

over the rapid changes in his affairs during these days, almost before he realized what he was about, found himself signaling a Blue line car, a large market-basket, as much as he could carry, on his arm, and a little bit of a paper package in his hand.

CHAPTER IX.

ANXIETY.

MRS. STONE and Beth will always remember that last night of the old year, when they sat up and watched and waited for Reuben and he did not appear.

"Mother," had Beth said, something like a dozen times, "do you think anything can have happened to him?"

"What *could* happen to him, child?" Mrs. Stone would reply, her voice almost cross. "Reuben knows the way through the city as well as a policeman, and he is a careful boy, and a great many of the policemen know him; so if there had been any kind of an accident we should have heard of it by this time."

But she peered out of the window into the darkness, and started at every sound, and grew so pale and so dizzy when once there came a strange step and a knock at her door, that she had to sit down in the nearest chair and send Beth to the door.

It was only a blundering errand-boy, who had mistaken his number, and Beth felt as though she would have enjoyed shaking him, to pay him for giving her mother such a fright

They set the little table out for three, as usual, and the tea-kettle sang merrily, and Beth prepared to toast the bread for a treat ; as a rule, they did not toast the bread, because they were so apt to eat a great deal more than they needed, and it took a certain kind of fire that was not economical, but for New Year's Eve Beth resolved to venture. On this night the coals glowed beautifully, then dimmed, then died out almost entirely, until Beth, discovering, built them up again with sticks from the morning's stock of kindlings, and cried silently while she wondered what they should do if Reuben were not there to kindle the morning fire ; then, indeed, they would be sure that something *awful* had happened.

"Mother," she said, speaking faintly, "don't you think you better eat your supper before the tea gets spoiled?"

"Not just yet, child ; eat your own supper, if you are hungry."

"Hungry !" Poor Beth swallowed and swallowed, to keep back the tears, and wondered if she would ever be hungry again. By-and-by, as it grew later, the mother took her turn at advice.

"Come, Beth, you may as well eat your bread and milk ; Reuben must have had some supper by this time. He has stayed late to help, somewhere, and they have given him his supper."

"I will eat if you will," Beth said, wistfully ; her mother looked so pale and heavy-eyed, that she felt able to push back her own anxiety, and try to comfort her.

"I am not hungry just now," Mrs. Stone said, and she dropped the corner of the curtain that she held up to peer out into the darkness, and went back to her sewing.

After a little, Beth, of her own accord, set away the bread and the milk and the little bit of butter, untasted, and came and sat down near her mother; but as her eyes rested on Reuben's slate and arithmetic, her brave little heart misgave her, and she leaned her head on the book, and cried outright.

"I wouldn't be so foolish," said Mrs. Stone, reprovingly; "crying won't do any good. Something keeps him, it's likely."

Beth felt sure of that; but the awful question was: *What was it?* She had her head hidden in her apron, and did not see the tears that her mother brushed away as she spoke.

Meantime, Miss Priscilla Hunter had been bustling about all day, doing no end of work in her new home; by night her sweet-smelling south room was in complete order, and shone like a picture. Much beside work did Miss Priscilla do that day; or at least, much beside arranging her room and tacking down her carpet, that was yet in a line with her regular work; she studied her neighbours. Miss Priscilla was not one who would live for three months next door to a family, and not know what their names were, and what they did for a living, and where they went to church, and whether they belonged to her Captain or not. She was always

interested in her neighbours. Beth Stone interested her exceedingly; she had peeps of her a number of times during the short busy day.

"That must be Beth," she said to herself, with a sagacious nod of her grey head, as Beth tripped down the stairs, while she stood at the upper landing. "A spry little girl, and as bright as a cricket, I'll venture; ought to be—to be the sister of such a brother. I wonder how the brave young man is getting on, and whether he sees his way clearer towards supporting his family. He'll support them yet; I'll risk *him*. He will have to see to it that that little sister wears thicker clothing though, this cold weather—calico, and rather thin at that: calico is cheap, I know; but it is cold stuff, and always and for ever wanting to go into the wash-tub; I like it in summer on that very account; but there's my blue merino tucked away doing good to nobody; it would be just the thing for a New Year's dress for the child, if the 'man of the house' didn't object—but he would; the child might earn it. I wonder what she can do—several things, I'll venture. I wonder what kind of a mother she has—a good mother, I think; a boy and a girl with such faces are apt to have good mothers—not always, but it is more than likely."

So Miss Priscilla talked to herself, and planned, and watched, and waited, and by night it really seemed to her that she was pretty well acquainted with the Stones. By dark, she, too, began to be somewhat anxious because the man of the house did not appear.

"I'm sorry he is out so late," she said, stopping frequently to peer out of the window; "I hope it isn't his custom: it won't do for a man with heavy responsibilities like his."

As it grew later, her anxiety gave way to positive alarm, mingled with a great pity for the mother and sister across the hall. If he was what she thought him, a trustworthy boy, this must be a new thing, and their anxiety must be great. She listened for sounds from the North room, and at last, when she heard an actual outburst of tears from poor Beth, she seized a cup from her little corner cupboard and started. It was just as Mrs. Stone was saying reprovingly, "I wouldn't be so foolish," that a tap came at the door. But it was the mother whose face paled suddenly again, and it was Beth who sprang to answer the knock.

"It is only your neighbour, Priscilla Hunter," said a cheery voice, whose owner walked in without invitation. "I've come to prove that I am a neighbour, and one of the borrowing kind, too. Could you let me have a little speck of soda? I've a bit of sour milk, and if I hadn't been so foolish as to forget to provide soda, I could have some griddle cakes for New Year's."

Mrs. Stone arose civilly and took the cup, and got the soda and handed it back to her neighbour, and stood, as though she expected her to thank her and go.

Such was not Miss Priscilla's intention. "Thank you," she said heartily, but she set the cup down on

the stand, and said, "Why, your room isn't quite so large as mine, is it? That is cosier for winter. So you are Beth? I've wanted to see you all day. Reuben took breakfast with me this morning, you know, and he talked a great deal about you; by the way, he is late to-night, isn't he?"

Whereupon Beth could stand it no longer, but at the mention of the dear name burst into tears again.

"Elizabeth, I am ashamed of you," said her mother, still reprovngly, but with quivering lip; then she, in few words, explained their nameless terror. "He was never so late before," she said tremulously, "and I don't know what to think."

"I'm glad of it," said Miss Priscilla in the cheeriest of tones, helping herself to a chair. "If he were in the habit of being so late, why then, Miss Beth, you might cry to some purpose; for it would be pretty certain some awful habit had got hold of him; but a boy who *always* comes home early isn't going to stay late without a good reason. He went off this morning as ambitious as the President, to support his family; and I dare say, it being the last day of the year, business has been brisk, and he has found himself, late at night, so far from home that his good common sense has come in and told him to stay all night; for it is piercing cold, and he is a prudent boy as well as a brave one. I kind of think you won't see him till morning."

Beth wiped the tears from her eyes and looked at her mother. A dozen times over had she said to herself in the last hour, "Oh, what if he *shouldn't*

come all night? What should we do! *What should we do!*" She had not dared to put it into words, for fear it would sound *so* awful! Yet here it was in plain English, and actually had a comforting sound. Something of the same thought was in the mother's heart.

"I don't know," she said, shaking her head at their visitor; but her voice was somewhat thawed from its civil coldness. "Reuben is a prudent and thoughtful boy for his years; he would think of Beth and me the first thing, and know that we would be frightened about him; and I doubt if he could be persuaded to stay."

"Yes, he could," said Miss Priscilla, still in that positive way which, somehow, on this night was so comforting. "You see, his very thoughtfulness would help him. Suppose he is four or five miles away at this minute; it is bitter cold, and if he undertook to walk it, he might almost freeze, and get himself ready for a fit of sickness; and being a boy of unusual common sense, he knows it, and he would say to himself, 'They'll be a little worried about me of course; but I can make it all right in the morning, and that will be better than walking home late in the cold, and getting sick; mother wouldn't like that.'"

Was Miss Priscilla a prophet? Her voice was so cheery and so decided, it actually comforted the mother to hear such possibilities suggested. "He always thinks of his mother," she said, gratefully; and she told herself that if Reuben *did* come home

safely, and nothing dreadful happened, she shouldn't wonder if they would really enjoy their new neighbour.

Miss Hunter seemed bent on making herself agreeable; she chatted on about Reuben, as to what he had said, and how he had helped her in the morning, and the plans they had made about milk, and how careful he had been to say that Beth must only go for it when it was pleasant, and she would like the walk. And so by dint of busy talking she contrived to make the next hour pass more quickly than the last two had done; but now it was really very late indeed, and the mother could no longer control her strong desire to do something toward finding her boy.

"If I could only go out and look for him," she said in a wistful tone to her new friend. "But where could I go?"

"Sure enough. You see you have no means of knowing which way he went, nor where he is sheltered now; so you would just get your death from cold, and do him no good. I feel it all over me that the boy is safe and comfortable somewhere. Now I'll just tell you the truth; I took a great fancy to that boy of yours this morning, and I've thought about him a good deal all day. He seemed kind of kin to me, somehow; so to-night I found myself watching for him, and when I found he didn't come home, I got that worried about him, that I just got down on my knees and asked the Lord to take him in His care, and see that he got through all right; and

He kind of sent me the answer that He would do just that thing. Do you often have such out and out answers to prayer as that?"

"No," said Reuben's mother positively; "*I never have.*"

As for Beth, she dried her eyes, and held up her head and looked at Miss Hunter in amazement. "How could God have told her that He would take care of Reuben?"

"Well, now I do, real often; and they always come out right, of course; and I never had a clearer answer than I did to-night; so I feel real kind of safe and comfortable about him. You don't know what a relief it is to go right to the Lord with your worries. Oh, yes, I hope you *do* know all about it. But if you haven't tried it to-night, I *know* it will help you. Now, what I propose is, that we three kneel right down now and speak to the Lord about Reuben; it will kind of rest and help us, to hear Him say over again that He will attend to it. Here is Beth will be helped by it ever so much; don't you want to try it, my dear?"

And Beth, whose knowledge of praying was confined to the few Sundays in which she had been to church and seen the minister close his eyes and fold his hands and talk to God, still knew enough to be aware that it was a respectable thing to do; in fact, she dimly remembered when her little sister was sick and died, years ago, that the minister came two or three times, and always prayed; so, though she did not at all like the idea of praying about Reuben—

because prayer in a home was associated in her mind with awful trouble—still she said, "Yes, ma'am," faintly, and without more ado Miss Priscilla slipped on her knees. Mrs. Stone sat bolt upright, but she stopped her needle, and rested her head on her hand; and Beth put her weary little head on the table, and Miss Hunter prayed. It was not like the prayers Beth had heard in the church; she couldn't explain the difference, but she *felt* it; so much, that once she raised her head softly, and looked around the room; it seemed to her that there must be somebody standing beside Miss Hunter, with whom she was talking. It was a very cheery prayer; it hinted not a word of possible danger to Reuben; it simply asked that he might be taken care of all through the cold night, might sleep safely and sweetly, and get home early in the morning. Then there was a sentence or two of thanksgiving, because she had been heard and answered; and again Beth looked about her and wondered who could have brought an answer.

"Do you know anything about that poor old lady who has the room back of ours?" asked Miss Priscilla, as soon as she arose from her knees. She had concluded that they had talked enough about Reuben. "Her door was ajar as I passed by there this afternoon, and I thought she looked very feeble; who takes care of her?"

Mrs. Stone uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"Why, that is old mother Perkins," she said, hastily, "and I declare, I forgot all about her, in my

anxiety over Reuben; I have not been near her to-night. I always look in on her these cold nights and tuck her up, and see that she is as comfortable as I can make her. Nobody takes care of her, ma'am, except us neighbours; the city furnishes her enough to keep her from starving, and she has a son who manages to pay the rent of that room. He comes home once a month to see to her. She has been bed-ridden for a week and has needed more care than usual. I ought to go in there this minute." And she hastily rolled up her sewing.

"If that is the case, she belongs to me, too," said Miss Hunter, in the same tone that she might have used if she had discovered a little fortune left to her. "I'll just stay with Beth while you go to see if she is all right; and to-morrow I'll get acquainted with her, and take my turn. I shouldn't wonder if she would like one of my nice griddle cakes for her breakfast."

But Mrs. Stone came back in haste. Poor old mother Perkins was rolling from one side of her bed to the other, and groaning with pain; she needed all the help she could get, and as soon as possible. Now there was work for the two families. Beth coaxed up the dying coals, and put on more; Miss Hunter dashed into her own room for a scuttleful, and put them on recklessly; then, between them, they filled the two tea-kettles and a large iron pot with water; and now, what with running from room to room, and hunting in a still unpacked basket for the mustard, Beth holding the light for Miss Hunter while

she looked, and hunting in the green-covered trunk for flannel, and wringing cloths scalding hot from the water, and feeding the fire, and feeding the kettles, and doing a dozen other things, the night passed quickly away. Reuben was by no means forgotten, but still Beth's heart was lighter; it had been, ever since that prayer, when she had peeped to see if she could see the messenger; for some one had certainly come with an answer. Had not Miss Hunter thanked God for it? And if the answer was a joyful one, as she seemed to be sure it was, why should there be any more worry? Beth was getting some new ideas this night. As for her mother, her heart so smote her for forgetting poor old mother Perkins, and letting her get so cold as to bring on those dreadful cramping pains, that she seemed to put Reuben and every one else aside, and give herself entirely to fighting the pain. It was not until the faint grey dawn of a new day was glimmering in the East, that the three families settled into quiet. Miss Hunter had said: "Now, I declare, if I'm not afraid your 'man of the house' will come and find that his mother has been up all night, without a wink of sleep; then I don't know what he *would* do. You just go and lie down for a bit, you and Beth: poor child, how she has trotted back and forth and up and down. I'll shade the light, and sit here by mother Perkins; she is so quiet now, I think she can sleep a little, too; then we will all be chirk for New Year's morning."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Stone, and she could not

help wondering what New Year's morning would bring to her; she had not felt the presence of the messenger, with the answer to Miss Hunter's prayer, as plainly as Beth had; but she was so tired out, that it was not hard to persuade her to lie down on the bed. She only waited to say, "As soon as it is light enough to pick my way out, I'm going to the corner police, to notify him about Reuben;" then she fell into a heavy sleep. But Beth held her eyes open long enough to say to herself, "I don't believe he will need the police; I believe he will come in the morning; I'm sure she was answered." Then she, too, slept.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETURN.

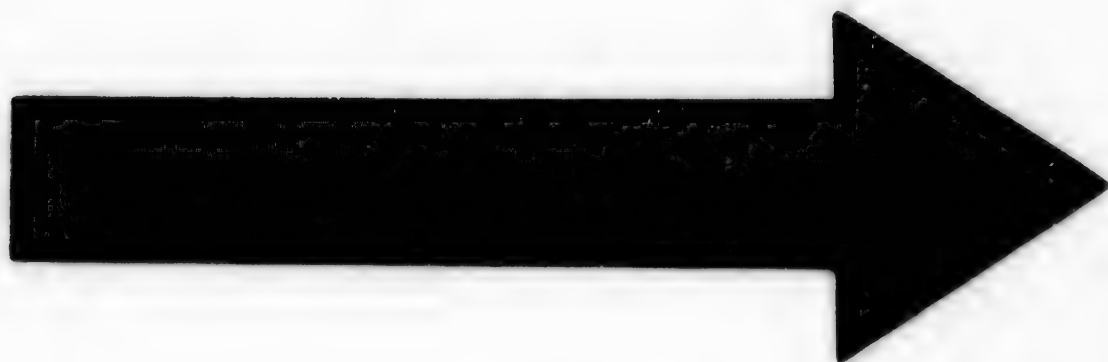
"HAPPY New Year!" said a voice close to Beth's ear. She dreamed it was Reuben, and that he came to her with his hands full of gold pieces, with which he meant to buy a cow, and a chair, and a farm in the country. She wakened with a start, to find the sun of New Year's morning flooding the world, and Reuben in very truth standing beside her.

"Is it really and truly you?" she said, sitting up straight and rubbing her bewildered eyes. "Oh, mother, mother! here he is, and he is alive, and nothing is the matter."

And Mrs. Stone opened her own heavy eyes, and New Year's morning began.

"My sakes!" said Miss Hunter, opening the door softly, so as not to disturb the sleepers, and shutting it suddenly and softly, so as not to disturb the people who were wide awake and holding a family council. Then she rushed away to her griddle-cakes.

Miss Hunter must have been very hungry; she whisked the cover from her little stone jar, and poured out a full bowl of nice, creamy-looking, sour milk. "Miss Hunter! Miss Hunter! Don't you





know that a bowl *full* of sour milk will make cakes enough for five or six people, and there is only one of you?" But Miss Hunter gave no heed, if any voice whispered that to her, but measured her soda with care, and dashed it into the milk, where it presently began to make such a sissing noise, that one who didn't understand the work that soda has to perform when it gets with anything sour, might have thought a bit of a steam engine had set up business in the bowl. "Gurgle, gurgle, gurgle," said the milk at last, changing its tone entirely; and Miss Hunter, who had been briskly stirring it all the while, said, with a satisfied air, "Oh, you're sweet, are you? All right; pity *folks* couldn't be made sweet-tempered as easy as that." Then she broke an egg into another bowl, whisking it around frantically with a fork until it was a bubbling suds, then she put the yellow foam and the white foam together, and stirred little tin shovels of flour into it, and salted it, and by-and-by, mercilessly dipped a spoonful of the mass on to a hot griddle, and lo! a lovely, round, brown cake, puffy and flaky. "As nice as the nicest," said Miss Hunter, nodding her head in a satisfied way; then she drew out her table and spread it with a clean cloth, and dashed at her bit of a cupboard, and brought out four plates. Had she forgotten that she was a lone woman? If she had, she made herself happy over the mistake, and added spoons, and forks, and knives, and cups, four of each, and made a ridiculous quantity of coffee for

one woman. When all was ready, even to the baking of a very great many of the puffy cakes, some of which she buttered and sugared, and some of which she only buttered, she set four chairs around her table, then slipped across the hall once more and knocked boldly at the north door. It was Reuben who answered the knock. He laughed when he saw Miss Hunter.

"Good-morning," he said; "I've got 'em; they are here in my pocket, safe and sound"—diving down for the things she had ordered. "I didn't know but you'd think I went to the North Pole for them; and I started, I guess."

"Dear me," said Miss Hunter, "I'd forgotten about the things, it was so long ago, you see; last year sometime, wasn't it? Happy New Year to you; we begun ours early in this house. Now, have they told you that you were going out to breakfast for New Year's morning?"

"Why, no'm," said Reuben, astonished; he was just making ready to introduce his mother to Miss Hunter. Then he laughed. "Not but that I'm getting used to going out to breakfast; I've been doing it lately."

"Well," said Miss Hunter, joining in his laugh, and turning to his mother; "it's the queerest thing; you know I was up some last night, and being kind of sleepy this morning, what did I do but go and mix up the whole of my sour milk, and the consequence is, I've cakes enough for half a dozen fami-

lies the size of mine, so of course you'll have to come and help me eat 'em; for New Year's, you know."

Of course they understood her pretty little make-believe of being absent-minded, and of course they were all polite enough to go to her pleasant room to breakfast, and grateful enough for all her kindness, to be happy, and enjoy those cakes, and those cups of coffee, as Mrs. Stone, at least, had not enjoyed a meal in many a day.

"What did I do with my basket?" said Reuben suddenly, as Miss Hunter helped him to the seventh cake; for, strange to say, in spite of his elegant breakfast, eaten from real china dishes, and with a solid silver fork and spoon, Reuben was hungry. "I had a basket when I came in; where did I put it?"

"You set it behind the stove in our room," said Beth. "I saw it, and wondered what was in it."

"I don't know myself," declared Reuben; "only it's something that is most awful heavy; I didn't know but it would break my arm, after I left the car. I guess I better bring it in and see what it is."

A wonderful basket was that! You should have heard the exclamations, as Reuben drew out the parcels one by one. A mince-pie, cuddled nicely among rows of doughnuts, for the top layer; then came a turkey, dressed and even stuffed, ready for the oven; then a dish of cooked cranberries, looking like a great mound of trembling jelly, as Reuben

uncovered the dish; then a large, round, frosted cake, then a chicken-pie, and each little niche in the basket was filled in with nuts and candies. On the bottom was spread a smooth, thick package, that Reuben said was the quilt for the turkey to sleep on, but a paper was pinned to the string, and on the paper, in delicate writing, were the words—"For Beth." So Beth's trembling fingers picked at the knot, until Reuben had pity on her impatience and his own, and cut the string; then was brought to view a lovely little fur hood and cape; not so very little, either, was the cape, for it reached below Beth's waist. It was curious to see how the different members of this family took the surprise. "Oh! oh! oh!" squealed Beth, and she jumped up and down and clapped her hands. As a rule, she was a quiet little thing, but she had never in her life before had any soft, furry garment to wear, and she thought they were *so* lovely. Mrs. Stone wiped her eyes, and said not a single word. She was very much surprised, and she was very glad, and she wondered if it could be possible that Miss Hunter's prayer of the night before had anything to do with all this.

"My sakes!" said Miss Hunter, "isn't that just splendid!" and she thought, but did not say, how well the merino in the trunk, when it was made to fit Beth, would look beside the fur hood and cape. As for Reuben, there was a sparkle in his eyes that was pleasant to see, when one remembered they were shining about his sister's gift.

"She must have been expecting me for at least a

week, and been getting ready," he said, soberly; and this made them all laugh.

"We must have a New Year's dinner," said Mrs. Stone, rousing to the heights of the occasion.

Then they began to plan, and as soon as Miss Hunter found herself fully counted in, as if she were of course one of the family, she had her plan ready.

"Now, I'll tell you what it is; your mother was foolish enough to sit up for you last night, and you know you did not get in very early (calling it night), and it stands to reason that she don't feel quite chirk this morning; what she needs is a good long nap, and she can have it as well as not, while I am cooking the dinner. Here's Beth to help me, and you, and we'll get up a dinner fit for the President—if he needs any better one than we do. What do you say?"

But here Mrs. Stone shook her head, and reminded Miss Hunter that she, too, was up all night, taking care of mother Perkins, and that she must be quite as tired as any of them. This, Miss Hunter assured her, was not the case; she was used to it: there was nothing like getting used to things. Her poor father was sick for years, couldn't sleep nights, and she used to be up with him part of every night, sometimes all night; she grew so used to being broken of her rest, that it really seemed almost foolish to lie in bed all night, and she often got up, and sat in a chair a while, just because she could not sleep. She had her own way—the truth is, she was

very apt to have—and in another hour or two, the north room was darkened, and poor, tired Mrs. Stone was lying in a sound sleep on the bed; she could hardly remember any other week-day when she had actually gone to bed in the middle of the day. In the south room there was a delicious smell already from the oven, where the great turkey began to make little sputtery remarks, and Beth and Miss Hunter were washing the cooking-dishes, and chatting together as though they had always known and liked each other.

A royal dinner it was that was served in that south room about two o'clock of the same day. Miss Hunter did not tell them, as she might, of the great dinners that she had been in the habit of managing on New Year's days, but her cooking told the story to Mrs. Stone just as well as though she had spoken.

It was not until late in the afternoon, when the dishes were washed and the party over, and the guests had gone home, that Reuben unfolded the piece of paper and showed his mother what was hidden away in it. He had looked before, and been so astonished that he shut it up quickly and dived it down to the very bottom of his pocket. Now, after having gone over every inch of the night, up to the time when he stepped into that bed made of down and poppies, to rest a minute, and answered a hundred questions from the curious Beth, about the rooms, and the table, and the pictures, and the piano, he said, "And see here, mother, there's something else I got." Then he laid the paper in her lap, and

she slowly unfolded it, and behold! there shone a ten-dollar gold piece. On the inside of the paper was written, in the same pretty hand that had written Beth's name:

"For the brave 'man of the house,' to help him in the support of his family."

"I told her, you know," exclaimed Reuben, "that I had a family to support; I said you had to work hard now, but one of these days I meant to have you sit in a silk dress, in a big armchair, and not do a single thing. Well, of course I didn't tell her *exactly* that, but she asked me questions, and I told her what I wanted to do."

There was more planning for the Stone family; it actually took hours to decide about that wonderful shining bit of gold. Reuben was for paying a great deal of rent in advance, and so having that off their minds for a while. "I hate rents," he said with energy; "catch me ever paying any when I'm a man." Then he was for buying a whole ton of coal, and a barrel of flour. But his mother reminded him that it was growing late in the season, and if the rest of the winter should be mild, they might not need a whole ton to carry them through to the days when chips and blocks of wood from new buildings would boil their potatoes, and there was certainly no place for a barrel of flour to stand. So, finally, with a little bit of a sigh, which he covered up as soon as possible, he laid the ten dollars in her hands, with a "Well, mother, there it is; I suppose the best way

is to keep it, and use it when you need it, just as you have always done; only I would like to get the mean old rent paid off for a few weeks ahead. I'd just like the fun of going to Mr. Grimsby, and handing it out, and getting a receipt; he always acts as though he was most sure we were going to cheat him out of it this time."

There was one other thing which made Reuben sigh, even on that happy New Year's Day. Of course he told his mother all about the saloon, and the offer of business. When he had finished his story, she looked sober. Something in her face disappointed him.

"Didn't I do right, mother?" he asked her eagerly. "You wouldn't have me go into such a business—would you?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said, in a troubled tone. "We are very poor, you know, and you and Beth both need clothes, and we need almost everything in the line of provisions. It is the first chance you have had. Poor folks mustn't be too particular, I suppose; it will do for the rich to have principles, but it costs too much for us."

"Yes; but, mother," said Reuben, with a distressed face, "I should have had to wait on men to brandy and wine, and all those vile things; you surely wouldn't have had me do that?"

"Why, you needn't have drank any yourself; and as for waiting on other people, somebody will do that, if you don't; there will be just as much of it

drank. I don't see but you might as well get the pay as any one."

Poor, troubled Reuben! His mother's words did not shake his resolution in the least, for Miss Hunter had burst that bubble by what she said about selling poison; but it was hard not to have her approve of his actions, as she had almost always done before this.

"I thought you would be glad," he said, in a low tone; "but I couldn't have done it anyhow, because I made a promise about it."

"A promise!" said his mother, curiously; "who did you promise?"

"I promised myself, last night, when I was riding along by that drunken man, you know, just before we crossed the track;" and in spite of it being broad daylight and he safe at home beside his mother, Reuben gave a little shiver. "Besides," he said, after a moment of hesitation, speaking more gravely still, "I guess I promised God. I asked Him to take care of me, and He did, I think; and I said, down in my heart, that I would never taste a drop of rum, and never do a single thing to help anybody else to take any. He heard it of course, and I guess maybe it is the same thing as a promise."

Here Beth, who had been a silent and attentive listener, suddenly burst forth:

"I wouldn't wear any clothes that were bought with their mean old money, nor eat anything that was got by selling rum, not if I starved."

"Dear me," said the mother, "what a couple of

temperance fanatics I live with ;" but she said it very pleasantly, and there was a smile on her face. "I suppose you are right, Reuben," she said, after a minute. "I was a little troubled about your having lost a chance to earn some money, on your and Beth's account, not on my own ; but I suppose it is best to keep clear of the business altogether. You are a good boy, anyway, and I shall never have to worry about you as some mothers do. I don't suppose we shall starve ; we never have yet, and to-day we have been a long way from starving." And she leaned over and kissed him in very motherly fashion ; but Reuben could not forget that troubled look. He went in to see that Miss Hunter was comfortable for the night, before going to bed, and it looked so cosy here, that he couldn't help sitting down a minute to tell her some more about this strange day ; it felt to him as though he had known her all his life.

"What do you think ?" he said, leaning over her little table, and looking up into her kind grey eyes ; "I had that chance we were talking about yesterday offered to me this very morning."

"What chance ?" asked Miss Hunter, all attention.

"Why, to 'hold out the poison' for other folks to drink, you know, and get good pay for it, too."

"You don't say so ! and you refused it ?"

"Yes'm," said Reuben, gravely. "But then I had a great long temperance lecture last night from a drunken man ; and I couldn't go into any such business, you know, after that."

I suppose Miss Hunter saw a connection between what he had told her and the verse she quoted, though Reuben couldn't quite understand what it was; but this was what she said:

"He shall give His angels charge concerning thee to keep thee in all thy ways."

CHAPTER XL

LOOKING FOR WORK.

DESPITE his wonderful last day of the year, and the rather remarkable opening of the New Year, I don't think our young man of the house felt much richer than usual, as he trudged down Second Street the next morning, wrapped in the old plaid shawl. He realized that it was very cold ; that ten dollars to pay house rent, and provide coal and provisions, would not last long ; that his mother had, that very morning, been refused work at the tailor's because the New Year's hurry was over ; and the last half of a hard winter was still before them. If he could only find some regular work ! There was St. Mark's ? " No, there isn't," he said to himself, stoutly. " So far as I am concerned, it is just exactly as though there *wasn't* any such place. I'm not going there, that's sure ! Even if I starve, I don't believe I could do it. You see mother didn't take that ride with me the other night ; if she had, she would feel different." Still he could not help feeling dreary. If tailoring was slack, it was quite likely that other work would be the same, and he had failed in finding any all winter, thus far. Could he hope to be more successful now ?

"Never you mind," had Miss Hunter said to him in a cheery way, as he went out that morning. "It will all come out right; you'll see. If you ought to have some work to do to-day, don't you suppose the Father up there will see to it that you find it?" This was new doctrine to Reube but he thought about it as he trudged along, and felt somewhat comforted. God had taken so much pains to save his life during that dangerous night. "He must think a little about me," thought the boy, "and it would be just as easy for Him to find me some work as it was to take care of me."

"That is a manly-looking chap," said a gentleman, who stood leaning against the glass door of a downtown grocery, nodding his head towards Reuben as he passed.

"Yes," said the young gentleman who stood near. "He is a queer sort of a genius; I became quite interested in him, and tried to help him a little, when I found he was looking for work; but I guess there is more talk than actual desire about it. I found him hard to suit."

"Is that so? I talked with him a few minutes the other day, and I thought him a particularly wide-awake boy. He said he had a family to support."

"Yer, that's a favourite remark of his. I offered him work only yesterday, and he refused it."

"What sort of work?"

"Steady, and good pay. Mother ran across him accidentally, and took a fancy to him, and for her sake I tried to help him. I could have got him in

at St. Mark's as waiter, but he declined the place because they sell liquor there." And Spunk's master laughed as though that were a good joke.

"Good for him! I like his pluck," exclaimed the gentleman leaning against the door, and he opened it and looked out after Reuben.

"I'm almost tempted to take him home with me if that is the sort of chap he is," the man said, as he peered down the street. "I wonder what became of him? Do you know where to find him?"

"Not I; mother does, I presume. She took a fancy to him, and sent a basket of things home to his family, I believe; but, Mr. Barrows, I think you would be disappointed in him. He strikes me as having impudence rather than goodness."

"I didn't think so," said Mr. Barrows. "I ran across him day before yesterday, and I thought him a remarkably bright, civil fellow; and an out-and-out temperance boy is hard to find in these days. It isn't the busy season with us, especially for boys, but if I could get hold of one of the right sort it would be a curiosity, and I would take him along."

Meantime, Reuben, all unconscious that Spunk's master was at work getting him a situation, came forlornly out of the store, where he had gone in to warm his fingers and see if he could find an errand to do, and stood looking up and down the street, uncertain which way to turn. "I just wonder which way I *ought* to go?" he said to himself; "I suppose it makes a difference. If I am to find any work to-day, of *course* it makes a difference: the question is,

which end of the city is it to be found? Queer now that God knows all about it; I wonder if He won't tell me which way to travel? I s'pose if I belonged to Him He would find some way of showing me just what to do, and how to do it; Miss Hunter talks just as though He did that for her." There he stood, this wondering boy, irresolute. Which way should he turn? Was there work for him somewhere? Did God mean he should have it. Would He show him how to find it? Reuben had never had what he called such queer fancies before. His late experience, as well as his new friend Miss Hunter, had made an impression on him, from which he could not get away. At last he turned, and went back up Second Street; he could not have told you why. He had certainly looked carefully on either side as he came down, and saw no sign of "Boys Wanted" for anything; still, something made him feel that he was to go back, and back he went. It was well he did; Mr. Barrows was keeping a sort of look out, and saw him as soon as he appeared in sight. He opened the door and motioned him in.

"How do you do, sir?" said Reuben to Spunk's master; and his respectful bow was not lost sight of by Mr. Barrows. Whatever the boy had done to annoy that young gentleman it was clear that he was not ashamed of it.

"Well, sir," said Spunk's owner, "found any work yet?"

"No, sir; but I guess I will; I begin to feel like it."

"I doubt it; you are too particular. Do you really *want* work, now, 'pon honour?"

"Try me and see," said Reuben, with quiet good-nature, ignoring the sneer that was hiding in the question. "Is Spunk well this morning, sir?"

There was nothing to be made by sneering at him, and the young man, with a careless answer to his earnest question, left the store. Now it was Mr. Barrows' turn.

"So you are still looking for work?"

"Yes, sir; and a body would think there was nothing for boys to do. I've been miles since I saw you, and not found much of anything."

"How did you fall in with Mr. Harrison?"

"Who is he, sir?"

"Why that young man who just left the store; I heard you inquiring after his horse?"

"Oh; I didn't know his name. We took a ride together the other night, and Spunk got afraid, and ran away, and we didn't get home until 'most morning."

"How came you to ride with Mr. Harrison?"

"Why he told me to jump in, so I did; and a wild time we had of it. You see," said Reuben, stepping nearer, and dropping his voice to a confidential tone, "he had been drinking, and he whipped Spunk, and she wouldn't bear it, and just flew away—went straight ahead in her fright, instead of making a turn, and got scared worse at the railroad crossing, and he dropped asleep, and it was dark and windy, and we had an *awful* time—Spunk and I had. I

thought none of us would ever get home alive ; but we did."

"I should have thought that would have been a good temperance lesson for you, my boy," Mr. Barrows said, his face very grave.

"Yes, sir," said Reuben, simply and gravely.

And Mr. Barrows looking closely at him, said to himself: "I don't believe he needed any. I believe he is a good boy. How would you like to get work out of town?" he asked, suddenly.

"I wouldn't mind, sir, whether it was out of town, or in, if I could take my family. I couldn't go without them, you know."

"Couldn't!" and Mr. Barrows began to feel that the boy's family was a reality, to be considered on all occasions.

"Why, no," said Reuben, earnestly. "You see they have only me to depend on; and there ought to be some man around to see after a woman and a little girl. I do a great many things that I wouldn't like to have either my mother or my sister see to." There was no mistake about it, he was a manly boy. Mr. Barrows' heart went out to him.

"I'm not sure," he said, "but the best thing you could do would be to move your family right out to our town. Your mother and sister could get nice work and good wages; and as for you, though I told you the other day I had no place for boys, I shall need one in the spring, and if you should happen to be the one I want, why I could find you something to do now. I guess your wisest course

would be to move. It is cheaper supporting a family in the country."

"Could I get a house, do you suppose?" questioned Reuben, his heart beating wildly over the thought of country life, such as his mother could tell him stories of. He and Beth had never seen green grass, and pink-headed clover, and yellow-headed dandelions. These were among their day-dreams.

"Oh, yes, there are houses enough. There is one now, just at the foot of my lot; a nice, little place for a small family. The man who lived in it has just moved out, because it was such a cold house, he said; but the real reason was, he was a shiftless fellow, and didn't like to take the trouble to bank it up, and put it in shape for winter. It is no colder than any other house."

"What is the rent?" asked Reuben, and his heart bumped clearly while he waited. It bumped harder when Mr. Barrows actually named a sum lower by several dollars than they paid for the north room and the big clothes-press! "I'll talk with mother," he said, eagerly; "she doesn't like the city, on Beth's account; if she will agree to it, I'll move."

"Suppose I go and see her?" suggested Mr. Barrows, who liked Reuben better every minute, and began to be quite anxious to have him move to the country. "I could explain some things to her better perhaps than you could."

Of course Reuben had sense enough to be grateful for this offer; so it happened that the morning was

not half spent when he appeared at the north room with a stranger.

"What has that boy done now?" said the wondering mother, as she looked out of the window, and watched Reuben crossing the street with long strides, the stranger close at his heels.

Towards the close of the talk, Mr. Barrows made a startling proposal. "Suppose the boy goes up with me, and tries the work for a few days, and looks around and sees the house? By that time he will know whether he cares to have you move or not. He seems to be a boy of uncommon good judgment. I have a couple of round trip tickets here; one of them is of no use to me. It is dated, and the time will run out before my son will be ready to come home. He bought it, and then changed his mind. I'll pass Reuben back, without any expense to him. It is a short distance, you see."

Somebody ought to be able to make a picture of Reuben's eyes for you, as they looked just then. A journey on the cars was another of the dreams that he had looked forward to; but a journey taken alone, sent off, like any other business man, to look after the interests of his family! This was something that he had not expected to reach for years.

"Reuben!" said his mother in dismay. "Why he is only a little boy!"

"He's an uncommon smart little boy, though, and I'll venture could look after himself, on a forty mile journey, as well as anybody could do it for him."

Considering the importance of the subject. every-

thing was arranged quite as soon as could be expected; and it was decided that Reuben should go that very afternoon, on the four o'clock train, to take a look at his possible new home. To be sure, Mrs. Stone changed her mind ten times after Mr. Barrows left, and declared that she could not have Reuben going off alone. "Why he had never spent a night away from home in his life!"

"Yes I have, mother," he said, with twinkling eyes; "spent it with a crazy horse, and a crazy man."

Miss Hunter came in to hear the news, and took Reuben's side with earnestness. She had no doubt that he would have a good time, and a successful journey.

"It seems kind of a wild thing to do," the mother said, looking doubtfully at Reuben. "But then it doesn't cost anything, and perhaps he ought to know whether he could do the work they expect of him, before we make any move. We must do *something*. I'd like to get into the country, if I could, before another summer; and this is the first shadow of a chance I have had."

So she bustled around to get him ready. You would be surprised to see what a length of time it took! This family was not used to packing. Miss Hunter lent an old-fashioned, flowered carpet-bag for him to carry his clothes, and Beth undertook to pack them. There were not so many that she had any trouble in getting them in; but grave questions came up for decision.

"Reuben," she said, turning to him as he came with his arms full of kindlings—he had been getting ready enough to last until he came back—"do you want to take your Bible?"

"Why, no," said his mother; "it isn't likely he will have any time to read; and it isn't worth while to make the carpet-bag any heavier than is necessary."

"But there will be a Sunday," said Reuben, "and I might want to read a chapter. I guess I'll take it. It isn't very heavy."

So the little Bible was packed. Behold Reuben, by half-past three, his Sunday shirt on, his carpet-bag on his arm, his cap in hand, ready to bid his mother good-by for the first time in his life.

"I'll be back in a week," he said, cheerily, "and if it's all right, we'll move there—won't we? Take care of yourself, mother. If it snows, Jimmy Briggs will come and make your path. I spoke to him about it. He owes me a good turn or two; and Beth, don't you go after milk unless it is real pleasant. Jimmy Briggs said he would as soon go as not; he hasn't much to do; times are so slack. I guess I've fixed all the kindlings you'll need, and I put some coal in my bedroom, mother, so you wouldn't have to go after it. Well, good-by."

His voice choked a little over that word. Never mind if it was only for a week. He was fond enough of his mother and sister not to be ashamed at the sight of a tear over bidding them good-by. As for Beth, she cried outright; and Mrs. Stone wiped her

eyes on her apron two or three times, while she stood at the window watching her boy go down the street. Mr. Barrows was walking the platform, looking out for him, when he reached the depot, and exclaimed, as he saw him :

"Here you are, eh? I began to think you would be left."

"No, sir," said Reuben, with the gravity and precision of a train-despatcher ; "there are four minutes yet before train-time."

Whereupon the gentleman laughed, and two other gentlemen looking on, nodded their heads, and said, "Good business talent there." But this Reuben did not hear. He followed Mr. Barrows, took a seat with him on the train; the engine snorted, and shrieked, and groaned, and finally, having made up its mind to start, did so with a spiteful jerk that threw a small boy entirely from his seat, and they were off. Reuben's first ride on the cars! You wouldn't have known it if you had been watching him. He was very quiet and at ease. He had stood outside and watched the train off so many times that its way of starting was no novelty to him. So he gave his entire attention to the way things were managed inside. Mr. Barrows found an acquaintance a few minutes after they left the depot, and went to talk to him. Left to himself, Reuben made good use of his time. A lady just in front tugged at her window to try to bring the blind down. The blind was obstinate and would not come. The afternoon sun streamed in on the lady and made her uncomfortable, so she tried

again; no use. Two or three gentlemen gazed at her in a sleepy way, but did not stir. "If I had ever *seen* such a concern as that before," said Reuben to himself in indignation, "I'd try to make it come down. I wonder how it is fixed, anyhow?" He leaned forward and studied it, and by the time the lady had gained courage to try again, he had made up his mind that she didn't pinch the spring at the right point, and decided to do it himself, or at least make the attempt. Down came the blind, settling into place with the promptness of one who owned itself mastered.

"Thank you," said the lady, who was young and pretty. "What a thing it is to know how—isn't it?" and she gave him a handful of pea-nuts. He felt very nice. It was a pleasant thing to have conquered that blind. He believed he should now know how to raise and lower all car blinds.

A boy in front of him, certainly younger than himself, next attracted our traveller's attention. The boy had his mother with him. That would have been the way you would have put it, had you seen them. You would never have thought of saying that he was with his mother; it was so evident that *she* was *with* him! He took such excellent care of her. He watched the sun to keep the blind just right, he fixed up the shawl strap for a pillow to support her head, and put a satchel at her feet. He brought her water in a glass, moving steadily and holding it carefully. When the conductor came through, it was from his, the boy's hat, that the tickets came; and, in

short, he was the *protector* of the lady by his side. Reuben looked on, pleased and observing. When he took his mother out to Monroe to live, he would take just such care of her. By-and-by, finding himself too near the stove, he took a seat with a boy somewhat older than himself, who was in a giggle over something; it was not quite clear what. Two seats in front of them was an old lady, a neat, trim lady, with a frilled-edge white cap, and a black dress and bonnet, looking very much like a neat, good grandmother to some boy or girl. Once there used to be a grandmother in Reuben's home. He remembered her. This woman was in some sort of trouble. Her tired old face looked red and frightened, and she turned first one pocket inside out and then another; took out the contents of her little black bag one by one, turned them over carefully, shook them, and then shook her grey head. Meantime, the boy giggled.

CHAPTER XII.

REUBEN ON THE RAIL.

"JUST look at that old woman!" chuckled the boy, nudging Reuben's elbow; "she has been going on that way for the last half-hour; she has turned every one of those pockets inside out at least six times. And of all the funny things that she's got in them!—dried leaves, and papers of pins, and a box of pills, and a stick of liquorice, and a ball of red yarn, and I don't know what all."

"What is she hunting for?" asked Reuben, his tone full of something besides amusement. In his heart he felt very sorry for the troubled old lady.

"Why, that's part of the fun; she has lost her ticket. We changed conductors a few stations back, and ever since this new one came on she's had spells of hunting for the ticket. She can't find it high nor low; and, between you and me, the conductor has about concluded she is fooling him, and never had a ticket."

"Poor thing!" said Reuben. "What will he do about it?"

"Why, he'll put her off; I shouldn't wonder if he did it at the next station; he has got about out

of patience with her. It is great fun to see her fumbling there. Wouldn't it be rich to see him put her off?"

"I think it would be horrid!" said Reuben, in indignation. "Aren't there any of the passengers who saw her with a ticket?"

"Oh, you're green; of course she had one; she has been on the cars all day: more than that, I know where it is. There's a little hole right behind her seat—a sort of crack; it slipped in there two hours ago. I saw it when it dropped, and I can see the end of it peeking out, when I stoop down. I should think she would get down on the floor and take a look through the cracks; but she hasn't seemed to think of that at all."

Reuben waited only to flash one indignant glance at the boy from his black eyes, then darted forward, jerking his sleeve away when the other, guessing his object, tried to hold him, and in a moment was by the old lady's side.

"I can find your ticket for you, ma'am," he said; and he dodged under the seat, and pushed his hand up through the hole behind, bringing out with him the ugly pink ticket that had caused the poor old lady such trouble.

"Oh, thank you!" she said, seizing it eagerly. "You are a good boy to your mother, I know. What a world of trouble you have helped me out of. I was more sorry than you can think, to lose the ticket; it wasn't so much the money, though that was enough, but I believe I should have been put

off the cars in disgrace; and they would never have let the old lady travel alone again."

"Oh, ho! aren't you a green one?" sneered the boy, when Reuben went back to his seat. "I didn't know that was your granny, or I'd have been more careful of your feelings; I wonder she didn't put her arms around your neck, and kiss you. I say, bubby, are you sure your mother knows you're out?"

"Are you from the poor-house!" said Reuben, eyeing him gravely.

"From the poor-house!" repeated the other, thrown off his guard by the suddenness of the question; "not much I ain't. What do you mean by that?"

"I heard they took a couple of idiots there last week, and I thought maybe you might be one of them."

This was the beginning of a series of persecutions which Reuben had to endure. The ill-behaved boy by the side of him used his tongue as a weapon, and made all manner of disagreeable speeches, as the train whizzed along. Twice Reuben changed his seat; but the boy immediately followed him, saying he must not think of being separated from the dear little fellow for a moment; he or his granny might come to harm if left to themselves. Beyond the first question, as to whether he was from the poor-house—of which, to tell you the truth, he was now a little ashamed—Reuben took no further notice of his enemy, and tried hard to keep his temper.

Presently came a boy through the car with great yellow oranges, the largest that Reuben had ever seen; and while he was watching, and wondering what Beth would say if she had one of them, and whether he would ever be able to earn money enough to buy her an orange every now and then, a strange thing happened to him. The little old woman in front got out her purse, and bought and paid for two of the nicest oranges in the basket, then trotted over to where Reuben sat, and laid one in his hand.

"I hope it's sweet and juicy, and will keep saying 'Thank you!' for me all the while you are eating it," she said, heartily, while Reuben stammered his thanks, and blushed, not so much for the orange, as he did for the boy, who broke into a rude laugh, and before the old lady was out of hearing, began:

"Did its granny give it an orange? Nice boy! should have an orange—so it should; and it should have a nice bib tied under its chin, so it wouldn't muss its little coatie toatie; yes, so it should;" and he seized Reuben's handkerchief, that lay in on the window-seat, and made a bib, and began to tuck it under Reuben's chin.

A good deal to his surprise, Reuben sat perfectly still, allowing the tucking to go on without disturbance, only saying, in the most good-natured tones: "You're an awkward fellow; I guess you are not much used to doing a kindness." Then he began to skilfully peel his orange. He had watched the process too often not to be skilful; but just as he had

nicely halved it, his seat-mate gave his elbow a jostle, which almost sent it on the tobacco-stained floor; but for a quick-motivated movement from Reuben, much as a boy would put out his hand to catch a ball, it would have gone.

"Dear me!" said the rude boy, in pretended surprise; "what a narrow escape."

"Very," said Reuben; "it would have been bad for you if it hadn't escaped, as that is the half I meant for you all the while. Have it?"

"You are a queer chap," said the other, eyeing him closely, and apparently speaking in earnest for the first time. But he took the orange, and sucked it with relish.

"I do say it is a sweet one," he declared: "the old lady knows how to pick them out. Say, honour bright, is she any relation to you?"

"Not that I ever heard of," said Reuben, sucking at his orange, and eyeing the old woman reflectively: wondering who he would have been, and in what way his life would have been different, if she *had* been a relation of his.

"Wher're you going, anyhow?" pursued his new acquaintance. "Is that man over there in the corner your uncle, or what?"

"What, I guess," said Reuben, laughing. "You seem resolved on giving me some relations."

"Well, I know that old chap; and if I were you I'd be glad he wasn't your uncle, nor nothing of that kind."

"Why?"

"Oh, because he's a skinflint. I worked for him, once upon a time; stayed three weeks—the meanest three weeks of my life."

"Perhaps he thinks just so about his life for those three weeks," said Reuben, laughing again, and glancing over to the man whose character was being discussed. He still liked his face, and believed in him, and he had not a very high opinion of the boy who sat beside him.

"Maybe he did!" said the boy, nodding his head with the air of one who could tell a hard story if he chose; "and maybe you don't know anything about it. I live in the same town, and I know all about him; there isn't a boy in town who likes him—not one."

Reuben instantly made up his mind that he was sorry because the boy lived in the same town where he was going, and resolved not to say a word about his own expectations and plans. Still, it could do no harm to learn what fault all the boys had to find with the man whom he liked so well.

"Why don't they?" he asked.

"Oh, because they don't; he's a mean man to work for; never wants a fellow to have any fun; is always calling out, 'Come, step spry! be sharp! Don't let the grass grow under your feet;' and all such mean things. He docks a fellow's wages if he's five minutes late, and he expects you to work right straight through, from morning till night, without stopping for breath."

"Nor for dinner?" asked Reuben.

"Oh, botheration! you know what I mean. It isn't likely you're so green as all that. Halloo! I declare! I've got home. Where are you going?"

"I'm going here, I suppose," said Reuben, springing to his feet, and seizing Mr. Barrows' satchel before he had time to look for it.

Then began one of those crowding, pushing scenes which every one understands about who has seen an express train stop at a way station, giving about two minutes for twenty or thirty passengers to get off. Plenty of time, only nobody seems to think so, and they are each determined on being the first one out.

When Mr. Barrows was on the platform, he turned suddenly, and said: "I have left my overcoat."

"Here it is, sir," said Reuben, just at his side; and the gentleman who had been talking with Mr. Barrows said:

"You have a wide-awake boy there."

"I believe I have," said Mr. Barrows, and he smiled on Reuben.

Among those who were struggling to get out was the little old lady, with her arms full of bundles. Perhaps it was nothing but carelessness that made Reuben's new acquaintance jostle against her, just as she was climbing down the steep steps, sending her bundles flying hither and thither; if it had been an accident, wouldn't you have supposed that he

would have picked up the bundles, with a red face, and said, "Excuse me?" Instead of which he put his hands in his pockets to keep them from the keen air, and laughed.

Reuben hastily gave the coat and satchel to Mr. Barrows, and stooped down to gather the bundles. Meantime, Mr. Barrows fixed a pair of very keen eyes on the giggling boy. "Andrew," he said, "you have not improved a bit in the last year—have you?"

"Yes, sir," said the boy, promptly; "I'm three inches taller than I was this time last year." But he blushed just a little, or else the north wind made his cheeks grow redder.

All the time there was something new for Reuben during this winter day. The next thing was a great high coach, with broad leather bands for the backs of the seats—four seats, each able to take three passengers, and, indeed, when there was need for crowding, four—the whole drawn by four eager-looking horses, whose restless feet pawed the ground as though they were in a hurry to be off. During all his ten years of city life Reuben had never seen such a coach before.

"Pi'e in," shouted some one, and a great many people ran across the snowy walk to obey the call, among them the little old woman; and by the time Reuben (who was really practising on her a little, trying to show himself how he would take care of his mother) had held open the door for her, and passed

in her bundle after her, it became plain that there was but one seat left in the coach.

"One of you youngsters will have to sit outside," said a stout man, drawing his overcoat about him, and eyeing Reuben and Andrew: the last-named "youngster" had been watching a fight between two dogs, and so was the last one at the coach.

"I know *I* won't, this cold night," he said, briskly, and, hopping past Reuben as he spoke, took the vacant seat.

Reuben laughed good-naturedly. "You needn't be in such a hurry," he said; "I'd just as soon ride outside." So, though the little old lady snuggled herself into a very small corner, and declared that they could make room for *that* boy, Reuben closed the coach-door and climbed to the driver's seat, well pleased to be so near to those four noble-looking horses. What a ride it was!—snow piled, in some places, higher than the fences, drifted in great white heaps on either side, leaving almost bare places, and making what Reuben learned to know by the name of "pitch holes," for the runners to drop into every few minutes. In spite of the jolting, and the sudden descents, and the little squeals which came from inside the coach, Reuben enjoyed the ride. In fact it was almost impossible for him not to enjoy a *ride* of any kind; he had so few of them, and he loved horses so dearly.

"How far is it to the village?" he presently asked

the driver, a great burly man, who was half buried in a fur overcoat.

No answer.

"Well," said Reuben to himself, "you are a gruff old fellow; why couldn't you as well be nice, and tell me about things? What is the use in folks being cross? This old fellow knows ever so much that I'd like to know, I suppose, and here he means to keep the whole of it to himself. Maybe he is half-frozen! I mean to try to thaw him. I wonder if he likes his horses. I'll see if I can find out. What splendid fellows your horses are!" he said, in a loud and admiring tone. He liked the horses so very much that he did not have to pretend in the least; but the bundle of fur beside him might as well have been a Polar bear for all answer that he received.

"He is a bear, and no mistake," said Reuben to himself, trying in vain to get a glimpse of the man's face; then he kept still. On went the horses, ploughing through the snowy road, which was growing more difficult at every step. Reuben began to watch things with wide-open eyes. It became very plain that the man who was holding the reins was not *driving*; he made not the slightest attempt at guiding the horses into the best parts of the road, nor in checking their speed as they went down a steep hill.

"If they didn't know how to drive themselves most wonderfully, we should all be pitched into a snow-

drift," said Reuben, and he peered curiously into the face of the cross and silent driver. He was more than cross; no sooner had Reuben got one glimpse when he leaned forward and gave a decided pull to the man's fur coat; then he said, "Well, I never in all my life!—never!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW HOME

If you had been there to get a glimpse of the red face, and had been Reuben Watson Stone, I presume *you* would have said, "Well, I never!" The words seemed almost to take Reuben's breath away; he sat quite still for a full minute. Another ride with a drunken man! Over a wild road, with four horses, and rows of men, women, and children inside!

"I should like to know," said Reuben, in his rapid thinking, "why *I'm* having all this time with drunken folks. I don't need so many examples, I'm sure. I don't believe there ever was a fellow less likely to grow up a drunkard than I am. But see here, what am I going to do?"

I'll tell you what he wanted to do. He believed in his heart that he could slip those reins from that stupid, sleepy man's hands, and manage those four horses as skilfully as he had managed Spunk but a few nights before. Only to think how splendid it would be to drive into the village with a grand flourish, having guided the four horses through all the snow-drifts, and brought home the people safely! Four horses! What would his old city acquaintance Tony Phelps, who boasted of the time when he once

drove two, think of that story! It made Reuben's heart beat fast to think of the possibility. Why shouldn't he do it? Why wouldn't it be a grand thing to do?

He managed Spunk in the night and darkness, with a railroad track to cross: here was nothing but snow, and daylight to see it with. But—and here Reuben's heart beat faster—who helped him the other night? who was he almost sure had heard the words he spoke in his terror, and quieted his heart, and given him courage, and brought him through in safety? Well, would not the same great Helper give him aid now? What made the difference? Reuben felt rather than reasoned out the difference. He knew very well that, in the other case, he was doing right—doing his best—doing the thing that mother, and every one else who knew of it, could commend him for. But suppose he should trust to his own small knowledge of horses, and undertake to manage this whole thing without the help of any of those men inside, would mother think he had done right? Suppose he got through safely, would *that* make it a right thing to do? Could he look up with fearless eyes to God, and ask His help for such a work? Thoughts something like these ran rapidly through Reuben's mind: he went over the whole ground much faster than I have been able to tell you, and decided not only what was right to do, but just exactly what he *meant* to do. He turned himself around in his high seat, stooped down, lifted the leather flap that served as a sort

of window to the front of the coach, and putting his mouth to the opening, spoke these words: "See here! This fellow out here has gone to sleep."

"What fellow?" asked two or three startled voices inside.

"Why, the driver; he has been drinking, and the motion of the sleigh has put him to sleep. He doesn't know what he is about. I've got the reins, but the road is awful."

Then there was a commotion inside. Two or three of the women screamed, and the little old woman grasped her umbrella tighter, and looked as though she would like to use it on the driver.

"You go, Dick," said one frightened woman, laying her hand on the shoulder of a rough-looking man who sat beside her. "You can manage any horses that were ever made; and I'm sure I shall die of fright if *you* aren't driving."

Thus coaxed, the rough-looking man smiled kindly, shook his brawny shoulders, and slowly clambered out, saying nothing, except to Reuben: "Tumble in there, boy, in my seat, and get warm."

"Ho!" giggled Andrew, the minute Reuben was comfortably seated; "you got a scare, did you? I wish *I* had been outside: I'd have kept hold of the reins and said nothing; and you'd have seen us come into town with a dash. I can drive four horses as easy as I can one. I just wish I had taken the outside seat."

"Thank Heaven, you did not!" This was what a pale-faced young lady said. Not carelessly, as some

speak their thanks, but with a grave, earnest face. And Mr. Barrows answered : " I think as much ! It is fortunate for us that we had a trustworthy boy on the front seat."

" Humph ! " said Andrew, with a chuckle ; " a coward on the front seat, you better say." And not a single person in the coach knew how great a temptation Reuben Watson Stone had met and conquered when he gave those reins into the hands of another. Never mind. He did not like to be called a coward, it is true. Who does ? But in spite of that, there was a very happy feeling at his heart. He could not have explained the feeling, he hardly knew why it was there ; but any boy who wants to understand just what it was like, has only to persist in doing what he *knows* to be right, when he doesn't want to do it, but would fifty times rather do what he believes to be just a little bit wrong.

A very busy day was that to our " man of the house." In the first place, there was dinner to eat at Mr. Barrows' house—a large, brick house, with a beautiful yard in front, filled with trees and certain mounds covered with snow, which Reuben knew must be flower-beds, and a barn in the rear which he privately thought was plenty nice enough for a house. The dinner, though not served in so elegant a style as at Spunk's home, was still much finer than anything that Reuben had ever seen away from there, and he did full justice to it—a little flurried, it is true, by the fact that Miss Grace Barrows, who was only eight, had not yet learned that it was rude to

stare, and gave him a good deal of curious attention. After dinner, Mr. Barrows said, "Now we will go to the shop." And Reuben, who was fond of all shops, or places where machinery could be seen, found plenty to keep his eyes busy.

"What in the world are they all for?" he asked at last, in great astonishment, after he had been taken through two or three rooms, piled from floor to ceiling with pasteboard boxes of all sizes and colours. "What can anybody possibly want of so many of them?"

"A good *many* people want them," said Mr. Barrows, laughing. "Gloves and mittens for all the world are packed in those boxes, and as there are a good many people to wear those, of course a good many boxes are needed."

From the ware-rooms, where the finished boxes were kept, they went to the work-rooms. Here were boxes in all stages of manufacture. Reuben stood before the huge shears, and saw its jaws, like some great monster, pounce down on sheet after sheet of pasteboard, and bite them into two smooth pieces. He went over to one side, and stood by a boy who was seizing two pieces, and glueing them into one so fast that you could hardly see the way in which it was done; he went to a little machine in one corner, and was astonished and delighted to see the rapid way in which it was biting out the corners of box covers. A boy about his own size was rapidly creasing these same covers, and still another was bending them into the right shape.

"Well," said Mr. Barrows, watching the eager eyes that were taking in so many new things; "which of all these things would you like best to work at?"

"Me?" said Reuben, charmed at the idea of anything so new and strange. "Why, I think I should like to work at every one of them, and know everything that there is to know about them all."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mr. Barrows, and he laughed.

Then they went upstairs to the pasting-room. At the door stood a barrel of paste. Reuben had seen his mother make a cup of paste to paper the shelves of her cupboard, but he stopped and gazed at this barrellful almost in dismay. He had not realized that so much was made at *once* anywhere in the world. Two girls were at work in the pasting-room, each at her own table, covering a great sheet of thin white paper, four feet long and more than two feet wide, with paste, then spreading it skilfully on a sheet of pasteboard of the same size, and smoothing it down. "It will tear all to pieces!" said Reuben excitedly, and he watched the reckless girl seize the wet paper, by what seemed two careless hands, and fling it over. "She will never get it turned in the world;" but even while he spoke, the paper lay down gently and smoothly, and was patted skilfully into place.

"I don't see how she did it!" he said in astonishment, and Mr. Barrows laughed pleasantly. He

liked the boy's keen interest in everything that he saw. In the trimming-room, just as wonderful things were going on. Lovely blue, and red, and green strips of paper, looking for all the world like ribbon, were being spread over a table, twenty strips at a time, each strip about half an inch wide and forty inches long, and when all laid in smooth rows, to Reuben's utter dismay, a brisk girl daubed them with paste! "They are ruined!" he said breathlessly. But no sooner was this dire act finished, than she seized upon one of them, Reuben expecting to see it drop into a dozen pieces, and whisked it round a box, covering the rough edges, and making it look like a gay treasure box. So many wonderful things were going on here, that after a few minutes Reuben ceased his exclamations, and gave silent and eager attention, bobbing his head from right to left, to take in all the sights, much astonished, all the while, at the reckless way in which boxes, that were just pasted together with flimsy-looking bits of cloth, were tossed about, and piled on top of each other, five, ten, fifteen feet high. He expected every minute to see them drop apart, and tumble around the room, but none did; and he could not help thinking of what Beth *would* say to such quick fingers, and wonderful work; so much prettier than taking little bits of stitches in long, grey seams!

"Would you like to learn the trade?" Mr. Barrows asked him, as they went down the stairs, after he had watched in silence, for half an hour, the

movements of a boy who was feeding a machine for trimming the edges of the pasteboards.

"Yes, sir," said Reuben, promptly. "I would."

Whereupon Mr. Barrows said it was about time they went to look after the little house. This recalled Reuben to a sense of his responsibility as "the man of the house," and he followed, with eager steps, across the street, behind a great snow-drift, to a trim little house, set in a yard, with a great tree before the door, whose huge branches were leafless now and snow-covered, but which Reuben could seem to see dressed in green, with a bird building her nest right in front of his mother's window.

Oh, those cunning little rooms! I don't suppose you can imagine how delightful they seemed to the boy who had spent most of his life in the "north chamber."

"This is the parlour," said Mr. Barrows, opening a door that led from the bit of a hall into a pleasant room, small, square, papered with a light-coloured pretty figured pattern, a mantel at one end, and a south window into which the sun even then was shining.

Reuben, as he gazed about him, chuckled inwardly at the idea of their having a parlour! What would Beth think of that! Besides the parlour, there was what Mr. Barrows called a dining-room and kitchen, a nice pantry, well supplied with shelves, and upstairs three beautiful rooms, each with a clothes-press.

"They are rather small, all of them," said Mr.

Barrows; "but then, for a small family, I should think they would do very well."

And then Reuben gazed on him in astonishment, almost in indignation. What did he mean by calling those lovely rooms small!

One—a south room—made him think of Miss Hunter, and he sighed a little. It was the one bit that he did not like about this wonderful prospect of moving, and living in a whole house, instead of one room and a clothes-press—this leaving Miss Hunter, the new friend, who seemed so much like an old one.

That south room, with the bit of a bedroom off, that Mr. Barrows did not count as a room at all, would be just the thing for Miss Hunter. What a wonderful thing it would be if she should take a fancy to move, too, and make gloves instead of vests! Then they might almost hope to pay the rent of this grand house! Especially as there was actually a garden and a place to keep hens, and an apple and pear tree, in the back yard!

"There is a woman lives on the south side of our hall," he said, speaking some of his thoughts aloud; "she is one of the best women who ever lived; she sews on vests and things, for the tailors. If she should move here too, could she find work to do, do you think?"

"Plenty of work at making gloves and mittens. There isn't much call for *women* tailors in this direction; but she can make better wages at gloves than she can at tailoring. This is a good time to come

here and get started. Fact is, some of the hands, a large number of them, right in the busiest season before last fall, struck for higher wages: they were getting pretty good wages too, but they thought they would like more, so they struck; and the manufacturers made up their minds that as soon as the new year opened they would hire new hands, and get ready for the next hurrying season before it came. So they are all advertising for workers: that is what people get who aren't willing to let well enough alone."

"What is the rent of this house?" It was a quiet little question, but it took Reuben nearly ten minutes to get courage to ask it; he so fully expected to have his hopes dashed to the ground by the answer.

"Well," said Mr. Barrows, meditatively, "that would depend a little on who rented it. If your mother wants it, I think I could get it for her for a hundred dollars a year."

"That's only a little over eight dollars a month," said Reuben, and his cheeks were crimson, and his eyes very bright. It actually was but a trifle more than they had to pay every month for the north room and the clothes-press! Now, if he could but manage to earn enough to make up the difference, and have a little left to go for coal, they might try the new home!

"What could I earn in a week, do you suppose?" and Mr. Barrows could hardly help smiling over the boy's eagerness.

"Well now, my man, that would depend entirely on yourself. Some boys don't earn the salt that they eat with their potatoes; I wouldn't promise to furnish it, for all they do. Then again there are boys who earn good wages, and help their mothers right straight through. I had a boy last year who earned his three dollars a week, all through the year."

"In the box business?"

"In the box business."

"How old was he?"

"About your age; a trifle older perhaps, but what he did, he could have done just as well if he had been a year younger."

"Was he a *very* smart boy; smarter than I could be?"

Mr. Barrows laughed.

"How can I tell? No, if you mean was he a remarkable boy, he wasn't. He was just a good, faithful fellow, doing his best."

"If I should do my best, could I earn as much as that?"

"I shouldn't wonder at all."

"For how many months in the year?"

Mr. Barrows laughed.

"You will make a good business man, I think," he said, pleasantly. "You remember to look closely into things. Well, the season, that is, the *busy* season, lasts for about nine months in the year. If I were you I would plan to work hard for those nine months, and go to school the other three—and do

odd jobs out of school hours to earn your board. For nine months I think you could earn from two to three dollars a week at the box business, without any trouble, and I would give you your board for what you could do after school, during the other three months."

"I think mother will come," said Reuben, with shining eyes; "and I shall tell Miss Hunter what you said about the glove business."

"All right," said Mr. Barrows. "I advertised for hands for my brother-in-law; he is a manufacturer, and he runs those little machines I was telling you about. If you say so, we will go now and see them."

So they passed out, Reuben locking the door of the neat little house, wondering much whether it could possibly be for him to lock it many times in the future. He felt in such a hurry to go and tell his mother all about it, that he was almost sorry that the last plan had been for him to spend the night at Mr. Barrows', and go home by the morning train. Still, if they were really going to *move*, there were ever so many things that he was man enough to know needed looking after. The little machines, one of which Mr. Barrows seemed to think Beth might manage, seemed to be the next things in order.

"The queerest-looking creatures he ever saw in his life!" This was the way Reuben would have described them had he been talking to his mother or Beth. They seemed too small to be called machines.

A round board about the size of a barrel-head, a shaft of wood about three feet long, standing upright from the centre of the barrel-head, finished at the top by a brass mouth about four inches long. This mouth had rows of tiny teeth on either side, matching exactly. It opened its jaws whenever the spring at the bottom was touched, and seized and held firmly whatever was placed inside. Reuben watched while a pretty girl of fourteen took a kid glove of about the right size for his mother, folded it carefully across the back, made the little creature open its brass mouth and take it in, then with a fine needle and a silk thread, she went rapidly down the length of the brass mouth, putting the needle between each tooth, making a little click, clicking noise with her thimble against the brass, and doing it all so rapidly that Reuben was lost in astonishment. When the jaws opened, and the glove was drawn out, he leaned forward eagerly to discover a long, smooth row of the daintiest stitches, somewhat like those that his mother took in shirt bosoms!

"It is beautiful!" he said, admiringly; "and how fast she did it!"

"How would the sister at home like that sort of work?" asked Mr. Barrows; and Reuben, who had not fancied the idea of setting Beth at work, for the first time began to think that perhaps such work as this might do for even Beth.

When he heard that very industrious, little girls actually earned sometimes a dollar a day, and that his mother would have no trouble in earning that

sum, he said emphatically, "I *know* mother will move."

At last the exciting day was done. Reuben had accomplished a great deal of business. He had been to the freight depôt, and learned the price of freight, and the exact way of marking it; he had learned the price of butter, and meat, and flour, and milk, and wood. In short, he had done everything that he could think of, which it seemed likely to him that a man, with a family to provide for, would have done. Mr. Barrows looked on, sometimes amused, and sometimes touched almost to tears by the small boy's thoughtful planning for mother and sister. Where he needed help he got it, but for the most of the work Mr. Barrows left him to himself, curious to see how he would carry out his plans. "The boy has the wisest head set on his young shoulders that I ever saw in my life!" he said to his wife that evening, after Reuben had gone to bed. "He hasn't done anything wonderful either. I don't know that he is any smarter than most boys of his age; he simply has used the brains that fellows like Andrew Porter spend in mischief, to help him in supporting his family. The notion he has that he is the man of the house, and must look after the comfort of his folks, like any other man, is worth a fortune to him. I believe the boy will be a rich man, while he is a young one."

"You have taken one of your tremendous likings to him," Mrs. Barrows said, laughing. "I don't wonder. I fancy him myself; and as for Grace, she

wants to teach him music and drawing right away. I hope the rest of the family are half as nice. Do you believe they will come?"

"I do, if Reuben can bring it to pass; and I think he can. I put the rent of the little house at a hundred dollars. I'd have made it lower, if the boy's bright eyes hadn't been fixed right on me. I knew he would suspect something; he isn't after charity. I hope I shall not be disappointed in him. If he doesn't grow up a smart, business man, as well as a good man, I shall wonder at it."

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE BOX FACTORY.

REUBEN WATSON STONE sat on the side of his bed and gazed about him. There was plenty to gaze at. He had never seen a prettier room in his life. The carpet was soft and bright, the gaslight making the flowers on it glow so that it seemed to the boy as though he might stoop and pick them. He thought of his sister Beth, and wished she could see the pretty carpet, and the pretty furniture, and the pretty curtains and everything.

"I suppose this is me," he said to himself. "It doesn't seem as though it could be. This is just the queerest kind of a world. Just think of the things that are happening to me! Ever so many of them come into one week. I lived most ten years without any happenings, and then they all came and tumbled themselves into a week! I wonder how we'll get money to move! Mother will surely move here, when she hears of how much money I can earn, and how nice it will be for Beth. We can both go to school some. It is a splendid chance. Isn't it a queer thing, now, that all these chances came because I wouldn't go to that St. Mark's saloon to sell liquor? Mr. Barrows said he never would

have thought of such a thing as bringing me home with him if he hadn't heard about that."

There were so many wonderful things to think about, that Reuben was in danger of not getting to bed at all.

He did not feel sleepy: in fact, he told himself that he didn't believe he could sleep a wink that night.

At last, however, he heard the clock around the corner strike ten, and, very much astonished at the lateness of the hour, he hurried into bed. No sooner was the gas turned out, so that all the pretty things were lost to sight, than he went to dreamland. The next morning began a new life for Reuben Watson Stone. He was to begin on that day to support his family.

Directly after breakfast—and a lovely breakfast it was!—he started for the great box factory, eager to learn all that could be learned about that wonderful business.

On the way, while Mr. Barrows talked with a gentleman who had joined them, Reuben talked with himself:

"Here I am," he told himself, "going to begin business at last! I've been for most two years hunting something to do, and now I've got it. Not a thing that I ever hunted for, or thought of, or even heard of; but something new and beautiful. Think of learning how to make boxes! I'll make a lot of them for mother some day, if I learn how, real nice. Beth would like some bright, red-trimmed ones, such

as I saw yesterday. Won't it be fun to show her how to do things?"

You can see that Reuben Watson Stone thought a great deal about his mother and his sister Beth. It was well that he felt so full of business; for if he had had time, he might have been a little bit homesick. It isn't an easy thing for a boy to be away from his mother for the first time.

In the pasting-room there were only boys at work; five or six of them, a little older than Reuben. They were covering great sheets of pasteboard with wet paper. Reuben was anxious to try his skill, and very soon had a chance.

He had dreamed in the night that he could do wonderful things in the box business. Alas for dreams! Never had he undertaken anything so dreadful. Mr. Barrows left him in charge of a boy named Wesley, with directions that he teach young Stone just what to do. So Wesley began a series of orders about what must and must not be done; all so rapidly given that poor Reuben was utterly bewildered.

"Won't you please go slower?" he asked, at last. "I'm getting all mixed up." Then all the boys laughed loud and long, as if getting mixed up were a good joke.

"Very well," said Wesley. "I'll go as slow as a snail. First you spread a sheet of paper on the pasteboard—not on the floor, nor on the wall, but on the *pasteboard*. Do you understand that? Are you sure I'm not going too fast? Well, then you take

the brush in your right hand—mind, I say *right* hand, because if you take the left, it's all up with you—and you dip it in the paste. Is that plain: *sure* you understand? Dip it *way* in; the more paste you get on the better; in fact, if you don't spread the paste on thick the first time, you spoil the whole thing; if you should take the whole tubful and pour over it afterwards it would do no good. Well, dash in your brush, and daub on the paste, half an inch thick, or less: wet every inch of the paper, then dip in your brush again and go all over it once more."

"Yesterday, when I watched you, you didn't dip it in but once," said Reuben gravely, sure that he was being made sport of, but not knowing enough about the business to be sure how far the sport went, and where the things that he must do began.

"Oh well, I was at work at a different quality of paper; that makes all the difference in the world," said Wesley. "You mustn't judge by your eyes; if you let them rove around to look at other folks, you'll never learn how in the world. Mind what I say to you, and go ahead! When you get your paper *real* wet, whisk it over; the quicker you can do it the better, and then with this big brush smooth it down; you have to bear on *with all your might*, or the thing goes and wrinkles; it is a ticklish job, I can tell you."

In much fear and trembling, Reuben went to work. He could see his fellow-workers giggling and nudging each other, and acting as much like wretches as

they could, while Wesley stood at his elbow, talking all the time and contradicting his own directions. It was worse than driving Spunk. He thought wistfully if Mr Barrows had *only* let him go in a room by himself—after watching the others for a while—and try it, he might have done something. But there was no help for it now. He dipped the brush into the bed of paste

“Dip lower, man,” said Wesley. “What are you afraid of?”

So he dipped lower, and, though it made him shiver, brought the dripping brush to the delicate white paper. Splash, splash, splash over the smooth surface; it reminded him of stepping with wet and muddy feet on a bank of fair morning snow. The paste lay in thick ridges all over the sheet. Then he took hold of the two corners carefully, at the same time remembering his direction to be “as quick as a wink.” Alas! it would not turn at all. It seemed to wilt in his hands into a soft and pulpy mass, and lie in a discouraged heap in the middle of the wet board

He looked up in utter dismay, while the boys shouted with laughter

“It is ruined!” he gasped

“I should thin’k it was!” laughed Wesley. “Isn’t enough of it left to make a dishcloth. *Awful* expensive paper, ‘oo; you’ll ruin the old chap, if you keep on long in this style. Try again!”

And Reuben tried again, and again, and again, his face red and pale by turns, his eyes now bright with

hope, now heavy with despair. Once his instructor kindly offered to show him how, and turned the dripping mass with a fling that Reuben tried in vain to catch; then he tried his skill with the rubbing-down brush, remembering Wesley's repeated caution to bear on hard; the consequence was that the wet mass parted in the middle, half of it staying on the board, and half of it rolling itself in a sticky ball, and following the line of the brush. With the fifth trial, which was worse than all the others, Reuben quietly laid down both brushes and walked out of the room.

"Beaten, as sure as I'm alive!" shouted Wesley, doubling himself up with laughter, and rolling over and over on a pile of pasteboards that stood near. "I didn't think it would be so easy done; something in his face made me think he wasn't so chicken-hearted as you would suppose from his size."

"Too bad on the little fellow," said one boy who had laughed less than the others. "He's away from home, and homesick, maybe. What was the use?"

"Oh, now don't you go to getting spooney!" said Wesley. "Serves him just right; what business had he to come slipping in here among us; there's lots of fellows in town who want the place. Barrows needn't think we are going to have any little rag-bag from the city poked in among us."

While they talked it over, Reuben went straight to the room marked "Office," and knocked at the door. Mr. Barrows' voice told him to come in. That

gentleman was seated at his desk, looking over a pile of letters; he seemed grave and busy. Reuben stood for fully five minutes before getting any attention. At last Mr. Barrows looked up and said, "Well!" not in a very encouraging tone, but as though he did not care to be interrupted.

"I don't think I'll suit, sir," Reuben said. He tried to keep his voice from trembling, but it was hard work, and his face was very pale.

"Sick of it already, eh?"

In spite of his disappointment and bitter sense of failure, Reuben could not help a wan smile from creeping into his face as he answered:

"No, sir; but it is sick of me. They tear just awfully! I've torn up and spoiled five of those great big beautiful sheets of paper, and I did my best."

"You have!" said Mr. Barrows, and Reuben could not decide whether his voice had anger in it, or only surprise and dismay; but he stood his ground manfully.

"Yes, sir, I have; and I'm awful sorry. I thought I could do it, and I tried; but it got worse and worse; and now if there was something that you were *sure* I could do, to give me till I earned enough to pay for that paper, I'd work nights and all."

"Just so," said Mr. Barrows; "I'll think about it. You may sit down on that stool until I write a letter, then we'll attend to it."

So Reuben perched himself on a stool, with folded

arms and sad heart, and was motionless until the rapid pen had dashed a dozen or more lines on the paper. At last the writer looked up again.

"Now, my boy, the paper tore, did it?"

"All to pieces," said Reuben, mournfully; "went all to *squash*! It isn't good for anything."

"And how did the other boys take it?"

"Well, sir, they laughed all the time."

"How did you like Wesley?"

Reuben looked down on the floor. What had that to do with the torn paper, and his failure in business.

But Mr. Barrows waited, and at last he stammered that he didn't think he liked him very well.

"Did the directions that he gave you about the work seem like common sense?"

"No, sir!" That answer was prompt enough.

"What was the matter with them?"

"Why, he said dip the brush way in, and put on lots of paste; and I didn't see how the paper could help tearing."

Mr. Barrows turned over some papers on his desk, and seemed to be thinking about them for a few minutes, then he said:

"Suppose you had a present of fifty sheets of pasteboard and fifty sheets of that best white paper, and nobody had any right to ask you what became of them, what would you do?"

"I'd earn some paste, somehow, and find a place to work in, and I'd learn how to put the papers on, if it took me all winter."

"Very well!" said Mr. Barrows; "I'll present you with fifty sheets of paper and pasteboard to spoil, if you have to, with the understanding that if they come out in good shape they are to be mine; and if they are spoiled, they are yours to make your fortune out of. I'll even lend you the paste"—a curious smile lighting up his face as he said this—"and a place to work in. You can pay me when you make your fortune. And now the sooner you get to work, the less time you will lose."

"Thank you," said Reuben, getting down from his perch, his eyes shining. "I'll go right at it."

Back he went with rapid feet to the work-room, and appeared before the boys, whose shouts of laughter were still echoing through the house. They stopped in astonishment at sight of him.

"Dear me!" said Wesley. "You here? I thought you ran home to tell your mother. Poor little fellow! He looks pale, boys; I believe he fainted on the way; we shall have to put some paste in his face to revive him."

But the fun was cut short by the arrival of Mr. Barrows; in an instant every boy who had left his post to help in the joke at Reuben's expense was back at work."

"These doors are very thin, boys," was the only hint that gentleman gave that he had heard every word. Then he called Wesley to him, and told him to stand by his side, and give the few general directions that were important in learning to spread the paper.

"Much paste or little, Wesley?"

"As little as possible, sir."

"You may tell Stone so, then."

And Wesley, with a very red face, repeated this to Reuben.

"About the brush, Wesley. Should the touch with it be light or heavy?"

"*Very* light, sir."

This, too, he had to repeat to Reuben. Then he gave strict orders that no boy in the room should speak to, or in any way interfere with the new-comer's ways of doing things.

"Whether he does a new way or an old one, right or wrong, I forbid any boy to interfere; he is going to experiment, and is to be let alone. Remember, boys"—in a significant tone—"I *forbid* it."

Then he went away, and Reuben had peace. The boys giggled, to be sure, and made funny speeches at his expense, at some of which he won their hearts by laughing; for Reuben was such a good-natured fellow that he could not help laughing at a joke, even when he was the victim. But his work was not meddled with, and after one or two failures, he began to catch the secret. When, two hours afterwards, Mr. Barrows looked in to see how the experiment was working, Reuben told him proudly that only seven of the pasteboards were his; he didn't see but the others were as good as anybody's.

"All right!" the gentleman said, with a satisfied

smile. "Keep track of these seven boards, and make your fortune with them."

Instantly there flashed over Reuben a new idea. What if he should begin to make his fortune out of those seven pasteboards! *What if he should!*

CHAPTER XV.

CLARKE POTTER.

FROM the pasting-room Reuben was called downstairs to the marking and cutting-room. The queer little machine that bit the corners out of the covers so skilfully, had taken his fancy the day before, and to his great delight he was set to working it. Skill was required here as well as in pasting, but it was of a different sort, and Reuben caught the movement of the machine at once; his eyes brightened with every turn of the bright shears.

"You have a very correct eye," Mr. Barrows said to him, and then his face broadened in a smile.

His success was worse for him, in one sense, than his failure in the upper room had been, inasmuch as it moved certain of the others to envy. They did not approve of the city boy at the best; as if there were not fellows enough in the town to run the factory! This was the way they felt, and this, in some form, was what they growled to each other from time to time. Little attention did Reuben pay to them; so that he guided the skilful shears in biting out those square corners, it was all he

asked. The very speed with which it worked was a delight to him. Reuben liked fast things.

Mr. Barrows was moving in and out, talking with first one workman, then another, with a general eye to all that was going on. During one of his visits he was sharpening a pencil with a very choice, four-bladed knife, whose pearl handle and polished steel caught an admiring flash from the eye of every boy in the room. Near the busy shears he laid both down for a moment, while he explained to the man who was running the large machine just how a certain kind of board was to be cut. Then came a sudden call for him from the office, and he went away.

It was perhaps an hour afterwards that he came in hastily, and looked among the fast increasing pile of chips that was gathering around the little shears as Reuben still successfully clipped out the corners.

"Boys, have any of you seen anything of my knife?" he asked, and half a dozen pairs of hands paused in their work, and as many pairs of eyes looked up to his; innocent eyes, and certain mischievous ones. But they shook their heads. Before, however, one of the others could speak, Reuben's clear voice was heard:

"Yes, sir; I had a glimpse of it. It is in the upper pocket of my jacket; and the pencil you were sharpening is there too."

Mr. Barrows looked at him in astonishment it is

true, but it did not compare with the amazement on the faces of the boys.

"Reuben," said the gentleman, in a grave, inquiring voice, "did you fear that the knife and pencil would get lost, and so put them in your pocket for safe keeping?"

"No, sir; didn't put them there at all; but I know they are there, for I saw them drop in." Then seeing that Mr. Barrows still waited with a grave and not altogether pleased face, he added: "I didn't touch them, sir, as true as I live."

"Will you explain, then, how they got into your pocket?"

"They were put in, sir."

"But not by your hands?"

"Not by my hands."

"Do you know anything about whose hands put them there?"

In that room, at that moment, busy place though it generally was, you could have heard a pin drop. Every boy was listening. One of them had a red face. For just a moment Reuben considered, then he spoke:

"Yes, sir, I know just exactly whose hands put them there; but I kind of think it was done just for fun, without much thinking about, or meaning any harm, and if you will take them away, and excuse the hands that dropped them there, I will too."

"Boys," said Mr. Barrows, turning from Reuben,

"you hear what this new-comer says. He is a stranger to all of you, but I know him a little, and I have some reason for trusting him; still, I will be fair to every one of you, and give you a chance to express an opinion. Do you believe that he has told the truth about my knife and pencil?"

A chorus of voices answered him:

"Yes, sir; we know he has."

"Very well, then, I'll claim my property."

And he went to the poor little almost worn-out jacket, and took from the pocket the four-bladed knife and pencil; as he did so, he said:

"Now there is at least one boy in the room who has been guilty of a very mean trick, and ought to be ashamed of himself. I don't know which one it is, and don't want to. Since Reuben has asked it as a favour, I am willing to excuse the hands that put them in. I hope the owner of those hands will be manly enough to apologize for the mischief he tried to do, and say 'thank you,' for the kindness shown him."

Then Mr. Barrows went away. Reuben made the little machine bite out the corners as fast as it could, and did not raise his eyes. Not a boy spoke. After a little one of them whistled, then several of them laughed. Reuben worked on. It was not until the great bell in the church-tower around the corner rang out its six o'clock call to come home to supper that the tongues of those boys were let loose. Then while they rushed for caps and coats and mittens, they all talked at once; not loud enough for

Reuben to understand what they said, but loud enough for him to know they were talking about the knife and the pencil.

One, the oldest and most lawless-looking, lingered while Reuben hunted among the chips he had made for a bright bit of paper that he had a fancy to save for Beth.

"Honour bright," said the boy, "do you know who put the knife in your pocket?"

Reuben turned full bright eyes on him and answered quickly:

"Know as well as though you had told me all about it beforehand; you did it yourself."

Whereupon the boy gave a sharp little whistle.

"What did I do it for?" he asked, presently.

"I don't feel so sure of that. I thought maybe it was just for what some fellows call 'fun;' I don't see much fun about it, but I thought perhaps you did, and if you meant nothing but that, why there's no harm done."

"Suppose I meant a good deal more than that?"

"Then there's lots of harm done; you feel mean over it by this time, and folks don't like to feel mean; at least, I don't."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Barrows which of us did it?"

"I didn't see any good in that. He got his property and that was what he was after, and I proved all around that I had nothing to do with putting it where it didn't belong, and that was what I was after."

"Well," said the other, after a somewhat longer pause, "my name is Clarke Potter, and I didn't mean a single thing only to have some fun, and tease you a bit; I thought you was a spooney little fellow away from his mother, and we might as well have a little fun with you as not."

"All right," said Reuben, gravely. "I'm a little fellow, that's a fact; look younger than I am, and I'm away from my mother. As for being spooney, I don't feel any too sure that I know just what it means down here in the country. Perhaps I am a spooney, and perhaps I ain't; never mind. The knife is where it ought to be, and I guess you and I will be all right after this."

"I guess we will; I mean to stand up for you. Only I'd like to know this: are you one of the goody-goody sort?"

"Don't know them," said Reuben, in utmost good-humour. "What are they like?"

"Oh bother! you're not so green as all that. Are you one of them that thinks it is wrong to wink, or sneeze, or whistle, and that tells your mother every time you turn around, and says your prayers, and all that?"

The merry twinkle went out from Reuben's eyes, but he looked with clear, steady gaze at Clarke Potter, and answered slowly:

"I'm good at whistling, or bad, I don't know which to call it; mother says I almost deafen her sometimes. I like to tell things to her first-rate, when I don't think they will worry her too much;

you see it is different with me from what it is with most boys; my father has been dead a long while, and I am the only boy—in fact, I'm not a boy at all. I have to do what I can to support the family. I've been the man of the house these three years, so I have to think about things. As for saying prayers, I never did much of that—forgot it, you know—after I got too old to say them with mother; but one night a while ago I was in an awful danger—didn't expect to get home alive—and I just asked God to help me, the same as if I could see Him, you know, and He did it. Since then I've thought it would be a good plan to ask Him about things."

Said Clarke: "You are a very queer chap! A *very* queer chap indeed!" he added gravely, after a slight pause. "But I'll stand up for you through thick and thin; I will so. And when Clarke Potter makes a promise it means something."

Work went on quietly after this for two days. The boys tried to tease Reuben occasionally, but there were two things in the way of their doing much in this line. Reuben was hard to tease; he was good-natured over what would have made many boys angry; he laughed when they expected him to frown, and whistled when they had planned for him to growl; besides, he soon discovered that Clarke Potter was a sort of leader among them, and when he said: "Look here, fellows, if you know when you're well off, you'll let that little chap alone; he's a friend of mine!" the boys knew he meant it.

Reuben's success in the box business was a surprise

to himself. He learned rapidly. Not that he was any smarter than most bright boys of his age, but he had a mind to do his best all the time: and the box trade is, like most others, easy to learn when a wide-awake fellow does his best.

He discovered from Mr. Barrows' manner, rather than from anything he said, that he was giving satisfaction, but on Saturday the gentleman spoke:

"Reuben, Mrs. Barrows thinks it would be a good plan for you to hire a woman to clean the little house, and get it ready for your mother. What do you think about it?"

Reuben's face brightened, then grew sober.

"I'd like it first-rate," he said with his usual promptness; "only I don't know whether mother would?"

"Why, she's the very one we are trying to please! What's in the way?"

"Well, you see, sir, it takes a good deal of money to move, and we are pretty short in that line, and I don't know but mother would think I ought to have saved the money and let her and Beth do the cleaning."

"I see," said Mr. Barrows, and he looked by no means displeased. After a few quiet minutes he spoke again. "There is a woman living down the lane from my house, who wants a cord of wood split and carried into her wood-shed. She works at house-cleaning, and washing, and all that sort of thing, and she can't afford to pay money for her work. How would it do to turn a job? or are you too tired, when

six o'clock comes, to think of splitting wood by the light of a lantern?"

Now was Reuben's face all bright.

"It will do splendidly!" he said with the eagerness of a boy who had a fortune left him. "If I can get the job, mother shall come to a clean house."

"You shall have the job," Mr. Barrows said with well-satisfied face. "I promised her this morning I would look out for a boy of the right sort."

An hour afterwards Reuben was downstairs piling boxes in the hall, ready for the delivery waggon, when Mr. Barrows drove up in his carriage, and jumped out, leaving little Miss Grace in charge.

"Shall I hold your horse, sir?" asked Reuben, bestowing admiring glances on the sleek coat of the handsome fellow.

"No; he is used to holding himself. He is better trained than most horses," Mr. Barrows answered, and passed into the office, where he stood talking with his foreman, and looking over some papers that were handed to him. Grace Barrows leaned out of the carriage and nodded to Reuben.

"How do you like boxes by this time?" she asked him.

"First-rate," he answered heartily, setting down ten of them at once with great care. "Don't you hold the reins when you are left in charge of a horse?"

"Oh, no; Samson never does anything but stand still until papa wants him to go."

"Is that his name? What a queer name for a horse."

"Isn't it a nice name? We call him that because he is so big. *Isn't* he big?" she said with pride. Just then a paper fluttered from the desk, out of the door, down the walk, stopping at the wheel of the carriage.

"Catch that, Reuben!" commanded Mr. Barrows, in a tone that said, "It is an important paper."

Reuben sprang after it.

What made a sudden whirl of wind just at that moment bring a great torn newspaper half-way across the street and fling it into the very eyes of Samson? Why should a torn newspaper frighten a horse out of his senses? A great many questions can be asked, but who stands ready to answer them? Not Samson, certainly, for he hadn't time. Away he flew as if he had suddenly discovered that his four legs were long, and made on purpose for running away. Not Reuben, for he had other business. His hand was on the hind spring, just where he had placed it in the act of stooping for the important paper, and as he did not let go, you can imagine, perhaps, just how fast he was travelling at that moment.

CHAPTER XVI.

REUBEN CONQUERS SAMSON.

OH, dear! What a boy was Reuben for getting himself into scrapes with horses! Here was he being whirled along too fast for thinking, one would suppose, while Mr. Barrows, without his hat, and with his coat-skirts flying in the air, followed on foot, shouting at the top of his lungs: "Stop that horse! Stop that horse!"

As if one could stop the wind! Men came out from their store doors and stared and winked, and by that time Samson had passed them. Meantime a white, frightened little heap was curled up in the closest corner of the back seat. This was Grace Barrows.

"Don't you be frightened, Gracie; I'm coming."

This was what she heard in the cheeriest of tones coming from somewhere near the ground behind her. Sure enough! Reuben had not clung to the hind spring for nothing. He had climbed like a monkey to the back of the carriage, and was hard at work with hands and teeth trying to unfasten the curtain; all the time he worked, he kept up a cheery conversation with Grace Barrows.

"Don't you be scared, Gracie; I'll be there in a

jiff. Can't you catch hold of the reins? Then perhaps he will stop."

"I can't," said the white, trembling lips. "They have dropped away down at the side."

"That so? Well, never you mind; this old buckle is giving way now; in another second I'll be there and I'll get the reins."

"O Reuben! Do you suppose you can stop him?"

"Of course I can. You'll see how quick he will mind when he has to."

What lovely music Reuben Watson Stone's voice was to poor, frightened little Gracie! Another vigorous twitch to the strap, and Reuben had clambered over the seat, and was reaching over the dash-board for the reins, all the time talking to Samson in a good-natured tone:

"Old fellow, good old fellow, don't be scared; nothing is the matter; it is just a notion of yours. You needn't go so fast as that; plenty of time; you are scaring your little mistress, and that is mean of you!"

At last he had the reins gathered firmly in his two stout young hands, and had climbed back to a seat, and pressed his two stout feet firmly against the dash-board. Then his tones suddenly changed, and Samson was greeted with a loud, firm "Whoa!" at the same time the pull on the reins was steady and strong.

"Whew!" said Samson to himself. "That means business! A minute ago I was my own master, and was flying away from that awful white thing that

came up to swallow me, and here I am being jerked at in the same old fashion. I wonder if I've got to stop! How he *does* jerk! I don't know his voice: it isn't my master; I don't believe. I'll stop. It is rather pleasant, this running away; I never tried it before."

"Whoa!" said the firm voice again, and the pull on the reins was steady and strong.

"I do believe I've got to stop going like the wind," said Samson.

To be sure I did not hear him say all this; but don't you know that actions speak louder than words? By the time they had reached the corner of the long square around which the town was built, Samson's wild run had steadied into a most respectable trot, and the people who looked saw only a little boy and girl taking a ride. To be sure, the boy had no hat on, and rather a light jacket for such a frosty morning; but that, of course, concerned only himself.

"Has he truly stopped running away?" asked Gracie, coming out of her little huddle in the corner.

"Of course he has; no danger of his doing any more of it very soon; he is beginning to be real ashamed of himself now; he feels mean. He wasn't exactly running away, only making up his mind he would. Now he is sorry that he didn't behave better, so he could be trusted. I see by his ears that he is sorry."

"He ought to be," said Gracie, drawing a long breath, and speaking in a voice that trembled.

"He never did such a thing before; papa has left me in the carriage lots of times, and not tied him, and he always stood just as still!"

"Well, you see, he thought that piece of newspaper was a great white elephant come to swallow him. He isn't a literary horse, and so he didn't recognize the morning paper." And Reuben fumbled in his pocket as he added: "I wonder if I've got that other paper safe! Yes, here it is. What a pity it isn't anything but a paper! It deserves a New Year's dinner or something for blowing out of the door just in the nick of time."

Whereupon he explained to Gracie how the little piece of paper with a few words written on it had suddenly started up and gone down to the carriage, and how he had been sent for it, and had just taken hold of the carriage to pick it up when Samson made up his mind to leave.

"Says I to myself: I'll hold on to the paper and you too, old fellow. I'm fond of riding myself, and if you won't wait for me to get my hat, why, I can go without it. See here, Gracie, if I turn at this corner will I get to the factory sooner? I'm in a hurry to see your father; or at least, I guess he is in a hurry to see you."

Do you expect me to try to tell you how Mr. Barrows felt as he saw that wicked horse whisking around the corner with his only little daughter alone in the carriage? It seemed to him that he fairly flew through the street, but Samson flew faster. However, he remembered the cross street also, and

with a wild hope that he might in some way head the horse off, he dashed across lots and reached the further corner just as Reuben guided Samson skilfully around it: meek Samson, obedient to every touch of the harness.

"Whoa!" said Reuben again, and Samson stopped.

"Here we are, Mr. Barrows," said Reuben. "It's pretty cold this morning for riding: still, we had a nice time."

"My little darling!" This was every word Mr Barrows said, and he had his arms around Gracie.

"I'm not hurt a bit, papa; not a bit," she assured him. "Reuben tugged at the straps and got them loose and climbed in, and Samson minded him right away after a minute. O papa, aren't you glad you brought Reuben home with you?"

"Shall I drive on, sir?" asked Reuben, who had slipped into the front of the carriage and who seemed to think that the talk was getting too personal.

"Yes," said Mr. Barrows, his voice very gentle and tremulous. He did not speak again, only to ask Gracie if she was very much afraid, and if she was quite warm now, and over her fright; but after he had lifted her tenderly to the ground and watched her into the house, he turned to Reuben, who stood at Samson's bridle awaiting orders, and said: "I shall never forget this morning, my boy."

Perhaps you think it was not much to say, but it sent the blood dancing through Reuben's veins and rollicking all over his face.

"Will you take the horse around to the stable for me, and unharness him?"

This was Mr. Barrows' next sentence, and almost before it was finished, Reuben had bounded back again into the carriage with a delighted "Yes, sir."

"What a lark this is!" he told himself as he drove through the avenue. "I shouldn't wonder if it would get me the chance of taking care of this great big splendid horse now and then. Clarke Potter said he wouldn't let one of the factory boys look at his old horse, but I've looked at him several times to-day, I'm thinking."

It was not until dinner-time that Mr. Barrows met Reuben again, just as he was leaving the box factory, and said:

"I suppose, my boy, the first piece of paper went off on the wind, did it?"

Then Reuben, with a red face, fumbled in his pocket.

"I forgot to give it to you, sir; Samson and every thing sent it right out of my mind."

"Then you really picked it up!" The surprise in his voice gave Reuben a queer sense of delight that he could not have explained if he had tried. "It is worth a thousand dollars, my boy. But you saved something for me this morning that is worth a thousand worlds, if I had them."

"My!" said Reuben. It was his only way of expressing astonishment; not over the "thousand worlds"—he was prepared to believe that Grace Barrows was worth a great deal more than that, but

over the fact that that simple-looking bit of paper could actually be worth a thousand dollars!

"I don't see how you got in," continued Mr. Barrows, staring down at the piece of paper. "Those buckles haven't been unfastened in six months, and I noticed yesterday that they were rusty."

There was a mischievous twinkle in Reuben's eyes, and he felt exactly like saying that he didn't get into that piece of paper, and there were no buckles on it so far as he could see, but he controlled his tongue and answered respectfully:

"Tugged at 'em, sir. You see I knew they had got to come unbuckled so I could get in. I didn't think I could climb over the top and get down that way in time to save mischief; besides, there was the danger of scaring the horse more by doing that."

"My boy, did you know that the lake was less than a quarter of a mile away in a straight line with the direction that the horse took?" Mr. Barrows' voice was husky and his eyes were dim.

"Yes, sir," said Reuben, looking down so that he might not seem to see the tears in the gentleman's eyes; "that was the reason I had to hurry so."

Mr. Barrows turned away abruptly; he could not trust himself to say any more just then.

On his way back from dinner, Reuben discovered that the work of cleaning had been begun on the little house. The windows were out, two pails and

a broom stood in the doorway, and a thick smoke was puffing out from the chimney.

"I wonder where she got a stove to make a fire in," said Reuben, as he stood, hands in his pockets, staring up at it. Someway, that smoke seemed like a little piece of home.

He wanted to go in and look around, but the clock in the church-tower just then gave a single, solemn stroke, and he took his hands out of his pockets and ran.

Several things not before mentioned had happened during the days that Reuben had been away from home. Among others, it had rained steadily and fast a day and a night, taking away every bit of the sleighing; then the ground had frozen and the lake had skimmed over as though it really meant, if the weather did not change its mind too soon, to give the boys a chance at skating; though as the water was deep, this did not happen except in severe winters.

The boys discussed the chances as they worked. They were about equally divided in their opinion of Reuben; part of them disposed to admire him, and the others to envy what they called his good luck.

"I'll tell you what it is," young Wesley said, with an emphatic shake of his head, while Reuben was gone to the office, "it took something more than luck to climb into the back of that carriage and stop that horse. My father says there isn't one boy in ten who would have thought of it at all, and half of

them would have been so scared they couldn't a done it. I think he showed himself a plucky fellow, and I say, let's all give in and be friendly. I'm going to ask him to go skating with us to-night."

Not a boy approved of this; some of them were really out of sorts about Reuben's coming, and some of them liked to disagree with whatever was proposed; so they argued the question hotly, declaring that Reuben was a little dried-up city dunce, and they would have nothing to do with him.

The more they talked, the more determined was Wesley to carry out his plan, and the moment Reuben came back he said:

"It's freezing hard; the ice will be prime to-night; want to go to the lake and have a skate?"

Reuben's eyes glistened his thanks for the invitation, but his answer was prompt:

"There's two reasons why I can't go; one is, I ain't got any skates, and the other is, I never skated a rod in my life."

If you could have heard the shout of laughter that greeted this answer, you would have thought that the strangest and most ridiculous thing in life was a boy who could not skate.

"Poor little fellow!" mimicked one in a tone that he might have used to a boy of six. "Didn't his muvver ever let him go on the ice? It's a shame, so it is! Poor little boy! we'll stop on the way down and buy him a stick of red-and-white candy, so we will."

These were some of the sentences those rude and

silly boys giggled out at Reuben. His cheeks were pretty red; no boy likes to be laughed at; still he answered good-naturedly:

"You can't pity me any more than I've pitied myself. I s'pose you haven't much notion of how I've wanted a pair of skates; but the honest truth is, boys, it was a choice between skates or bread, and when it comes to that it doesn't take a fellow long to choose. Fact is, I'm poor. Always have been ever since father died, and I haven't got around to skates yet; maybe I shall some day."

There was something in this manly little explanation that seemed to please Wesley, although he had been laughing as hard as any of them.

"Quit bothering him," he said. "He's a plucky fellow, and a friend of mine. I won't have him abused."

Nevertheless, the fun about the skating went on. Not to know how to skate was something so strange to these country-bred boys that it seemed as though they could not get over laughing about it. Presently came Andrew Porter to call on the boys, and he brought news which turned their thoughts into another channel.

"You here yet!" was his greeting to Reuben, in a tone of mock surprise. "I thought you would be gone home to your mother by this time. Had any more scares?" Then he told his version of the stage-coach story. "He came up in the four-horse with me, and rode outside till he got so awful scared at the horses that he had to creep inside, and let a

fellow take his place." I think the boys would have been more ready to believe this story if they had not known about Samson's performance that morning, and Reuben's share in the matter. As it was, knowing Andrew as well as they did, not a boy believed that he had told the truth. Yet they laughed. Then Andrew produced his news. "Say, boys, are any of you going to the rignagig at the Hall to-night? I peeked in there this afternoon and saw some of the pictures while they was fixing the canvas; just splendid, they are! Great big things! cover all one end of the Hall, and just as natural as life. A hundred pictures! Don't you know about them? Why, it's the nicest thing that ever come along here; everybody says so. Of course I'm going. The tickets are only fifty cents."

Andrew talked exactly as though fifty-cent pieces grew on the bare branches of the winter trees. If the boys had only known how many twists and turns he had had to make, turns that were not even *quite* honest in order to get that fifty cents, they might not have envied him so much. As it was, they pasted away and looked disgusted, some of them. Not a boy there who could by any means afford to pay fifty cents to see pictures. Yet they were very fond of pictures. All boys are.

Andrew went on with his extravagant account of the wonderful "peeps" he had taken that afternoon, and of this and that and the other favoured boy who was going; all rich men's sons. Skating might be all well enough, but it was fast losing its charm

for that evening. Every boy wanted to go to the Panorama.

In the midst of Andrew's description, Reuben was summoned to the office again. Andrew paused long enough to say: "Now, old fellow, you're going to get your walking paper. I heard Barrows as I was coming along telling what an awful nuisance you were." Then he went on with his description. Reuben went away smiling; he was too sadly used to all sorts of bad boys in the city, to be shocked with Andrew; and he could afford to smile on his own account. He knew very well how far Mr. Barrows was from considering him a nuisance. He came back with eyes shining, and worked with double speed the rest of the afternoon. If you had been in the office with him, this is what you would have heard Mr. Barrows say: "My boy, here are a couple of tickets to the exhibition this evening at the Duan Street Hall; I think you will like to go. Perhaps there is some boy in the shop, or out of it, that you would like to take with you, since Beth isn't here. And Reuben, one thing more; I would rather you wouldn't go into the little house until after the cleaning is done. Just wait until I give you permission, will you? The person working there doesn't like to be disturbed."

Over this last, Reuben pondered as he worked. He felt a great longing to see the little house with clean floors and windows. "She must be a touchy body," he said, thinking of the "person" who was hired to clean the house. "Just as if I would dis-

turb her! But I suppose she thinks if I come the other boys will. I can wait." And he whistled over the thought of all his joys.

"Look here," he said to Wesley, as the two went down the hall together with a pack of pasteboard on their shoulders. "I'm real obliged to you for asking me to go skating to-night; I'd like no better fun. But seeing I can't, suppose you go with me."

"Go where?"

"To that picture exhibition at the Hall."

"Just so. I'm agreed. Where shall we steal the tickets? Have you made your plans?" with a mischievous twinkle in his black eyes.

"Yes, *sir!*" said Reuben. "Got 'em all made. Look here!" And he showed two green tickets.

Then Wesley whistled.

CHAPTER XVII.

SOME NEW EXPERIENCES FOR REUBEN.

It was Saturday night, just after the great clock in the church-tower had struck six, that Mr. Barrows gave Reuben the key to the little house, with permission to look in and see that everything was all right.

He stood on the little stone door-step and looked about him a few minutes, key in hand. It seemed so new and business-like to be standing before a door which belonged to a house that he had rented, and into which he was to move his family so soon; for now he felt sure that his mother would come. He had dreamed often and often of the time when he would rent a house and move his family, but even his wildest waking dreams had put the time a few years ahead. Yet here he stood, all ready to do it.

"What a nice place this would be to keep a cow!" he said to himself, looking around on the bit of a yard with a neat shed at the back, looking wise and manly, and trying not to notice that his heart was beating like a sledge-hammer. "I wonder if we can't manage one of these days to have a cow! I wonder what Beth would say to that—whole tumblerful of

milk! I wonder what Beth will say to everything!"

And he drew a little sigh. It began to seem a long time to wait from now until Monday before telling Beth about things.

The night was cold, so he decided very soon that it was foolish to stand outside, when he might as well go in. How nicely the key fitted in the lock! He threw the door open and stepped into the bit of a hall. There was a neat oil-cloth on the floor. He stopped and looked at it in surprise. He had not noticed it when he was there before.

"Maybe it goes with the house," he said aloud. "I hope it does. How nice it looks! Mother couldn't afford any now. I don't see where the money to move is coming from. That's what bothers me."

This he said just as he was opening the parlour-door. For the next few minutes he said not a word. If you could have seen his face, you would have wanted a picture of it to take home with you and keep. He swung his lantern aloft, to get from it all possible light on the scene, and stood still. On the floor was a red and brown carpet, small bright leaves growing on a woodsy ground, looking to him, somehow, like the stories of the woods that he and Beth had read together.

Soft the carpet was. He lifted one foot carefully and set it down on a bright autumn leaf, then drew it back. He could not have that leaf stepped on. There were curtains at the windows, some warm, bright colour, making him think of sunshine. There

was a little round stove over by the mantel, and a fire burning in it. The room was warm. There was a round table drawn out in the centre of the room, and some chairs around it as though people had just been sitting there, and had gone away for a few minutes. There was even a little old-fashioned, cushioned lounge.

Reuben did not know it was old-fashioned, but he knew it was beautiful. Not a word did he say. He went on tiptoe through the room into the pretty kitchen. How pretty it was! The floor had been painted; he saw that at a glance. He saw everything at a glance. A stove set up and glowing, shining with blacking outside and coals inside. The little cupboard stood open, and there were dishes ranged in rows, as if people had just eaten supper, and washed and set away the dishes. How quietly and yet how brightly the fire burned in the stove! Reuben thought of the one at home that always smoked and sulked and glowered.

"Well!" he said at last. "Well, if this isn't the queerest way to clean!" Then he tried to whistle. He had always whistled before when anything surprised him; but something was the matter with his throat. He choked and coughed, and tried to make a clear sound come; then he actually sat down on one of the neat chairs, of which there were several in the room, and cried. What was he crying about? He couldn't have told you if you had been there and asked; in fact, I suppose if you had been there, he wouldn't have cried; but his heart was so

full of astonishment and delight, and some other queer feeling of which he did not know the name, that the tears would not stay back.

"Reuben Watson Stone, you're just a simpleton, that's what you are!" he told himself at last, very much amazed over the tears. Then without more ado he went upstairs. What could it all mean? He began to feel afraid that some dreadful mistake had been made, and some other family not belonging to him had moved in. Here was more carpet on the floor, and a bedstead set up, and curtains at the windows, and a little rocking-chair, and a pretty oval table.

"Look here," said the boy at last, setting down his lantern on one chair and himself on another, "wake up, can't you? I say, old fellow, you must be dreaming. This isn't your house! Where did all these things come from, and who are they for? *You* don't own any of them. What are you going to do about it? This is just the queerest world, anyhow, that ever was heard of; there is never any telling what will happen next. I only wish Beth could see the flowers on this carpet! She would pick 'em as sure as the world." Then suddenly remembering the wonderful fact that Beth would see them very soon, that queer lump began to come into his throat again, and he started up suddenly and seized his lantern and hurried away. He didn't know what to make of himself, but he meant not to cry again.

"Well," said Mr. Barrows, as he appeared at

last in the kitchen where Reuben was putting away his lantern, "been over to the new house, have you? Has the cleaning been done to your mind?"

"Cleaning!" repeated Reuben. "I never heard of stoves and carpets and things being *cleaned* into a house before. Mr. Barrows, I don't know, I can't think——" And there he stopped, and that ridiculous lump began to swell and swell in his throat again.

How was he ever going to be able to talk with that coming up to choke him?

"All right," said Mr. Barrows, smiling, "you needn't think anything about it; I'll guess all you were going to say."

"But, sir," said Reuben, "I meant, I didn't mean—you know, sir——" Here Reuben stopped again.

"Of course," said Mr. Barrows. "I know all about it. You didn't mean anybody should help you support your family. You didn't expect any help, and you're quite right. You'll be able to do it nicely, I haven't a doubt; but see here, my boy. Never be afraid to take a little hearty lifting from your friends, when they can do it as well as not and like to, and it will make things easier for your mother. Nothing very wonderful has been done. The carpet was some that we had; didn't want to use it, and it might as well go down there and make things homelike. The stove in the kitchen is second-hand. We needed a larger one,

and so we turned it out; it wouldn't bring much of anything for old iron, and yet it is a pretty good stove, and will save your mother paying for the moving of hers. As for the stove in the parlour, it is out of use this winter, and may as well stand there as anywhere. And the furniture is a present to your sister Beth from my little girl. My boy, you have done for me this week what all the stoves, and carpets, and furniture in all the world can never pay, and I didn't help furnish your new house for *pay*, but just because I wanted to. You can tell your mother you earned every cent of it, and more too; for I put it there because she had a good, brave, trustworthy boy."

What was Reuben to say? He had never felt so stupid in his life. At last he made a bold dash:

"I don't know how to thank you," he said, looking up with frank, earnest eyes into Mr. Barrows' face. "I never learned how to thank folks, but I'm just as grateful as I can be, and I'll do the best I can."

"All right," Mr. Barrows said. It was a favourite sentence of his. "When I have learned how to thank you for taking care of my Gracie, perhaps you will have learned how to thank me for a stove and a few things. You see we are hardly even, my boy."

Reuben went away with red cheeks. Of course he was glad that he had used his wits and been able to rescue Gracie Barrows; but he told himself, as he made ready for bed, that anybody would have done that, who knew enough; but there were lots and lots of people who wouldn't have put all those nice things

in the little house for his mother. And I suppose that was true.

The next day Reuben went to church in a new fashion. His church-going had been very fitful. He had sometimes climbed into the gallery of the great building where he went to Sunday-school, in order to hear the organ play and see the well-dressed people; but he always felt out of place and uncomfortable. Very few people sat up there, and those few looked forlorn and friendless. Nobody spoke to him or looked at him, and he gave very little attention to what was going on after the organ was still. The minister may have preached very good sermons; Reuben did not know. He was busy deciding how he would dress mother and Beth when he became rich, and which pew in the church he would hire, and whether he would drive to church in his carriage. All these plans and many more had Reuben, and church was the place in which they grew faster than anywhere else. But on this Sabbath he felt like somebody else. In the first place, he had a new overcoat.

"I wonder if Bennie's coat would fit him!" Mrs. Barrows had said at the breakfast-table; and her husband, with a startled look on his face, had said that he shouldn't be surprised if it would; at least it might be tried if she said so.

After breakfast it was brought: a grey coat, long and heavy, with many pockets and many handsome buttons. It fitted to a charm. "It was my little boy's," Mrs. Barrows said, her eyes looking tender

and said. "We bought it for him only a few months before he went away; I have never wanted anybody to wear it; but if it hadn't been for you, perhaps we should have had no little girl in the house this morning. My Bennie was a good boy. I think I'll give you his coat."

All this made the lump come into Reuben's throat again, and swell larger than ever; but he resolved then and there he would never soil Bennie's overcoat by thinking a mean thought under it. It covered his worn and patched jacket to a nicety; covered even the patch on his pantaloons: and, with his shoes blacked and his hair combed, he felt, somehow, as though the good times of his dreams had begun to come, and he must attend to what was now going on, instead of looking for any more. New things were pouring in on him so fast they needed all his present attention. So he sat up straight in the end of the Barrows' pew, beside the gentleman; and though it was pretty warm, kept his overcoat on, tightly buttoned to his throat, and listened as well as he could to the sermon. But it was in the afternoon Sabbath-school that he did his best listening.

The class he was in was very unlike any that he had ever known about: at least, the teacher was. In the first place, she was a young and pretty lady. Reuben had a fondness for well-dressed people. He did not know it—at least did not realize it—but he liked to look at them. He admired his teacher very much. The only other teacher with whom he was acquainted had been a man who read questions at

him from a book: questions that he did not understand, and did not care about. This one did not seem to him to be talking about a Sabbath-school lesson at all.

"I wonder if any of you boys know how to manage a boat?" she began, and some of them did, or thought they did, and others of them had questions to ask; and before he knew it, Reuben grew very much interested, and forgot all about the lesson.

"What do you think you would do in a storm?" she asked the boy who knew how to manage a boat. And that started talk afresh, and one told what he would do, and another criticized it, and at last, when Reuben was appealed to, he had to own that he knew just nothing at all about boats.

"Well, in any danger," said the teacher. "Suppose you are in some place where you know there is danger: you have done the very best you know, and yet you feel sure you are in great danger, and know of no way to help yourselves; what would you do next?"

"Why, there wouldn't be anything to do," declared one boy, "only to stand still and let it come."

"Or run away from it," said another.

"Suppose you couldn't run away from it?" said the teacher; "suppose it would run away with you?"

"I'd find a way out somehow," said another.

"But we are supposing that you had tried all your ways out, and were *not* out, only felt yourselves getting deeper and deeper into trouble—what then? Think, all of you. Is there one in the class who has

ever been in a great trouble, out of which he could not help himself ?

Quick as thought did Reuben's mind go back to that wild ride with Spunk and his drunken master, over dark and dangerous roads, with the flying express train chasing them. He had kept pretty still until then, an eager listener, with little to say, but, at the memory of his danger and his escape, he drew a long, half-shuddering sigh, and said, almost before he knew it: "I tell you what it is, I've been there."

The boys turned and looked at him, and the teacher smiled on him and questioned: "In danger, my boy ?"

"Yes'm."

"And did you know what to do ?"

"Some things I knew, and did them ; but there came a time that there wasn't anything left to do only hold on, and that I did with all my might ; but it didn't seem to be doing any good."

"And then what ?"

"And then," said Reuben, in a slow, grave tone, his face paling over the memory of it all, "I told God about it."

"And did He answer ?"

"Yes'm," said Reuben, simply.

The boys looked at him respectfully. His face was flushed now, and he looked down to the floor. He wasn't used to being talked with about such things.

"I am very glad," said the teacher, brightly. "You are better able, perhaps, than any of the rest of us, to understand how Peter felt when he got out



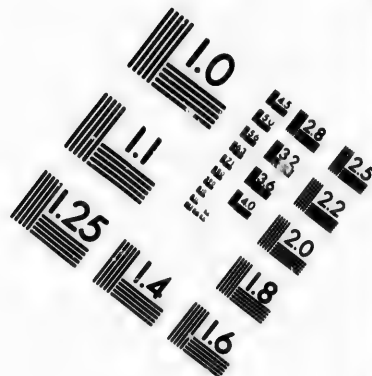
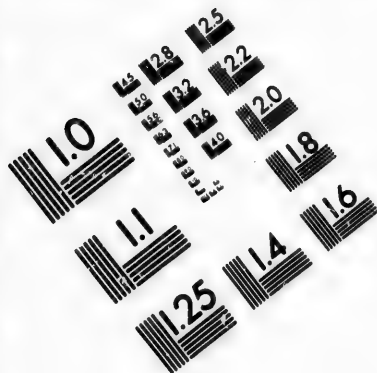
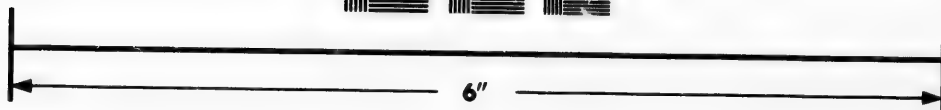
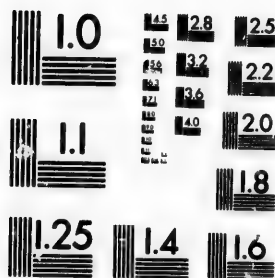


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on that water, trying to walk on it, and found that he couldn't; found himself sinking. It wasn't until then that he called out to the Lord. I wonder, Reuben, if you waited until you had done for yourself everything that you could think of before you called to Him?"

"Yes'm," said Reuben, going swiftly back over his experience; "I did just that."

"People are apt to," she said. "Peter did so too."

By this time every boy in the class wanted to know about Peter. Reuben had been placed in one of those trying classes where not a boy studied his lesson; and of course he hadn't. He never dreamed of such a thing; so they were all ignorant together, but all eager to hear. Then began the story of the night ride on the lake, with hard rowing and contrary wind; and One walking on the water, of whom the sailors were afraid at first, and to whom Peter tried to go, and almost failed. It was a new story to Reuben; in fact, almost all Bible stories were new to him. He was very much interested; forgot that he was a stranger, and asked questions with such eagerness that the teacher found it a pleasure to teach.

But out of all this came something strange.

When the last hymn was sung, and the prayer was offered, and the scholars were crowding out, this new teacher laid a small gloved hand on Reuben's shoulder, and said, in a voice that he never forgot: "I'm glad to see that you are a Christian, my boy."

Then was Reuben startled indeed. The blood

rushed over his face away to his forehead, and he turned and gazed on her with astonished eyes.

"Ma'am!" he said at last, not knowing what he ought to say.

"I am glad that you love the Lord Jesus, and look to Him for help, and have found Him able and ready to help you."

"Oh, but," he said, in great confusion, "that is a mistake. I don't know much about Him, and I don't belong to Him at all."

"Is it so?"

And Reuben felt his cheeks grow hotter over the sound of disappointed surprise in her voice.

"I'm so sorry. I thought since you knew where to go in trouble, you surely must be one who followed Him. Don't you think you ought to be a Christian, my boy?"

"I don't know what a Christian is."

He looked full in her face, and spoke the words gravely enough. He knew almost nothing about these things, and had wondered over them a good deal, especially since he had known Miss Hunter.

"A Christian is one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and tries to do as He says."

"I don't know much about what He says, and as to loving Him, why, I never thought of it before."

Reuben was always honest, so now he spoke his exact thoughts.

"One thing He says is that everybody ought to make up their minds to obey His directions all the time."

"That mightn't be easy to do."

"No, sometimes it isn't; in fact, it can't be done at all without His help, but He is always ready with that. And the beauty of it is, the only safe way, and the only happy way, is the one that He points out."

"Then I shouldn't think it would be hard to mind Him."

"Not after we once decide the thing. Will you decide it now, Reuben?"

Reuben was startled. What a plain question this was! And the lady looked right at him with bright, earnest eyes, and waited for his answer.

"I don't know," he said at last, looking down.

"Are not you a boy who always tries hard to do just as he says he will?"

"Yes'm." He didn't hesitate a minute over this answer. He felt so sure of his promises.

In fact he prided himself on doing just that.

"I thought so. I wish you would promise to do this thing."

"But I can't, you see; maybe it is a promise that I couldn't keep; and I don't want to make any such."

"No; but you can certainly keep this if you choose. Won't you be willing to take my word for that?"

No, Reuben wouldn't. He did not say so, but he looked down, and looked troubled, and seemed not at all ready to answer, and the lady waited.

"Well," she said at last, "will you promise this: That you will think about it all the rest of this day;

that as much as you can you will keep from all other thoughts, and just give your mind to this?"

"To what?"

"To deciding whether you will take Jesus Christ for your master, and obey Him in every little and great thing all the rest of your life."

"Yes'm," he said, after another minute of hesitation. "I will promise to *think* about it."

Then she reached forth her hand and took his little brown one in it for a moment, and smiled and said:

"Thank you. I can't help thinking you are a true boy, with good common sense, and I'm not afraid of the way you will decide, if you only *think*."

CHAPTER XVIII.

REUBEN TAKES TWO PRISONERS.

THEN Reuben walked home with Grace Barrows. She chattered like a magpie, but Reuben was quiet.

"What makes you so still?" she asked him at last.

Because he had something to think about, he told her.

"What is it? Oh, I know! you are thinking about going home to-morrow, and getting the folks, and coming back, and riding on the cars, and moving everything. You have a lot of things to think about."

"No," said Reuben, with a grave face. "It would be easy enough to think of all that; but I mustn't do it to-day; you see I promised I'd attend to something else."

"Promised whom? What must you attend to?"

But Reuben did not choose to answer any of these questions; instead, he began to inquire about her class in Sabbath-school; what sort of a teacher they had, what they talked about, and how much she had learned.

"Oh, we didn't talk about anything much!" said

Grace. "Only a little about Peter, and some about Jesus. Miss Pason didn't tell us anything to remember; at least, I don't remember it, if she did. You had the best teacher in the school, Reuben. Everybody says Miss Parker is the best teacher in our school."

"I believe it," said Reuben, sturdily; then he was quiet again.

He did not seem to himself to get on with his thinking. How was he ever to do it if this chattering little girl stayed by his side.

When they reached home it was not much better. Mr. Barrows laid aside the newspaper he was reading, and began to talk to Reuben, advising him as to what train to take and planning for him how soon he could get back.

All the while Reuben sat with a grave, thoughtful face, wondering how he was to keep his promise. He tried to think just what he had promised; to keep as much as possible from thinking about anything else but the question whether he would belong to Christ or not.

"But I don't know how to belong to Him," he told himself; and then remembered in the next second that it made no difference; he must decide whether he would belong; after that he could find out how to do it.

"Anything gone wrong with you?" Mr. Barrows asked at last, with a kind smile, seeing Reuben so quiet.

"No, sir," said Reuben.

Then Gracie came to the rescue.

"He has something to think about, papa; something he promised to decide."

"Indeed, what is that?"

"I don't know, papa; it is a secret, I think; but Reuben promised to do it."

"Promised whom?"

"The teacher I had to-day," said Reuben, seeing that Grace was not going to answer for him.

"Yes; and, papa, it must be a good promise, for Miss Parker was his teacher."

"I daresay it was," said Mr. Barrows, looking curious. "Do you need any help about it?"

"No," said Reuben slowly, looking very thoughtful; he had nearly said yes; then he remembered that it was something to *decide*. How could anybody help him to decide a question like that? After it was settled, he might need a great deal of help, but not before.

You would be surprised, perhaps, to know how that promise troubled Reuben all the rest of the day; he could not get away from it, and he could not seem to settle the question. He wished for Beth; things always seemed easier and plainer when he talked them over with Beth. But then he remembered that she knew nothing about this matter.

Then he looked over at Gracie; she was a little girl to be sure, but a very sensible one; he wondered whether she had ever made such a promise as this, and settled the question. She was reading her Sabbath-school book; he didn't like to disturb her.

Presently she looked up and spoke :

"I don't believe I like this book ; it is for grown-up people."

"How do you know ?"

"Why, it is all about folks being Christians ; telling them how, and why they ought to be, and all that."

Reuben was astonished ; how strange that Gracie's book should be about the very thing of which he had promised to think.

"Does it say there that folks needn't tend to such things until they grow up ?"

"Why, no," said Gracie, slowly and thoughtfully.

"No, it doesn't ; it says that little bits of children ought to be Christians ; but I don't see how they can."

"Why not ?"

"Because they can't be sober all the time, and think about dying and going to heaven."

"Does it say there that when folks are Christians they must be sober all the time, and think about dying and going to heaven ?"

"No," said Gracie ; and this time she laughed.

"But then grown-up folks who are good do, I suppose."

"I don't," said Reuben, positively. "I know some good folks who think about their work, and about making nice times for other people, and they look pleasant, and laugh and talk." He thought of Miss Hunter. "What is being a Christian, Gracie ?" This, after waiting for her a little and getting no answer.

"Why, it is being good."

He shook his head.

"No, it isn't; it is just loving Christ and trying to mind Him."

"Well, don't you have to be good before you can do that?"

"Do you have to be good before you can love your father and mother?"

"Oh, no!" she said, laughing again. "But that is different. Why, Reuben, Christian people are good people."

"Yes, I suppose they grow good; they would have to, of course, if they tried to mind Jesus; but they don't have to be good before they can love Him, according to all that I ever heard of."

"No," said Gracie, "of course not; I didn't mean that. People can't be good, of course, until they get new hearts; and they won't get them without asking Jesus, and they wouldn't ask Him if they didn't love Him a little, I suppose."

Reuben turned towards her eagerly; he knew very little about this matter. He was not sure that anything had been said to him about a new heart; maybe that was something to attend to before he could decide.

"What do you mean by that?" he asked her.

"By what?"

"By getting a new heart."

"Why, I mean just that. Jesus can give folks new hearts, and He does, of course, before they are Christians."

"How can He? Hearts are inside of us. How can God take them out while we are alive and give us new ones?"

"Why, Reuben Stone! don't you know what I mean? Of course our hearts are not taken out of us! But Jesus puts new thoughts in them; makes them over in some way, so we can like to do things that before we didn't like to. I don't know how He does it, but I know that is what a new heart means, and you've got to have one before you can be a Christian."

"And you get it for the asking?"

"Yes," said Gracie, confidentially—she had been well taught—"you get it for the asking; and then you are a great deal happier than you ever were before; and you like to pray, and read the Bible, and go to church, and all that; and you aren't afraid to die."

"Have you got one?"

"Why, no!" and this time she blushed a little as well as laughed. "What a queer boy you are I told you I thought it was for grown-up folks. How can little girls think about such things?"

"But little girls might have to die. The other day when Samson was running away with you, he was going straight toward the lake, and it wasn't frozen over then, and he might have tumbled you in and drowned you."

"Don't," said Gracie. "It makes me shiver all over;" and she hid her face in her hands.

Pretty soon she ran away to her mother and told

her that Reuben Stone was the queerest boy to talk she had ever heard of in her life.

Then Reuben, left alone, went on with his thinking. Grace had certainly given him several reasons why he ought to decide this question. He thought she was a queer little girl to know so many reasons why it would be nice to be a Christian, and know just how to become one, and yet would rather wait until she was grown up.

"I don't believe I would," he said to himself; 'I'd like to begin now. It's hard work, I suppose. All new things are hard to do, and some old ones; but it would be nice to feel that you wasn't afraid of anything. Then there's lots of places where a fellow needs help; and He helped me once. I know a few things. I know I'll have to read the Bible; I don't like that very well, but I should if Gracie knows what she is talking about, and I got that new heart."

Before him on the table lay a little bit of a blue-covered book not more than two inches wide, and hardly three inches long. Reuben stretched out his hand to it, then drew it back. Hadn't he promised to think of nothing but this question all this day? Still, it might be something that would help him. He would just glance at it. "Heavenly Manna" was the name of it. Reuben didn't know the meaning of "manna," but the word "heavenly" seemed to fit the subject, so he looked inside, and found it to be a little book of prayers and promises, dated to suit the days of the year. Of course the most

natural thing in the world was for him to turn to the date of the day and look at the verses. He could hardly believe his eyes. How very strange! These were the verses:

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

"A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you."

"There's the prayer, and there's the answer," said Reuben, thoughtfully. "The thing is now for me to do it."

But for some reason that he did not himself understand, he did not do it. He knew something about Satan, but he did not, after all, know what an enemy he was, nor how frightened he was about this afternoon's work; nor how anxious he was to keep the boy from deciding this important question once for all. If he could only get him to thinking of something else! Reuben wondered a good many times in the course of that day, what could be the matter with his mind. It was so determined to think of everything but the question. He came back to it again and again, because his promise called him; but it did not hold him steadily to the work. And so it happened that when the day was gone, and Reuben was ready to lie down in his bed, he said to himself with a sigh:

"Well, I've done my best, anyhow. I never knew it was so awful hard to keep thinking of the same thing. Nothing has come of it, either. I don't decide. Why don't I? It's queer, now, but I can't

tell why I don't. Gracie made me think she was a goosie for not deciding. I suppose I'm a goosie. I wonder what mother thinks! She must have had this question to decide ever so long ago. Maybe she is at it yet."

A feeling came over the boy that he wouldn't like to be so long settling the matter as his mother had been, supposing she was still thinking about it. Then why didn't he kneel down then and there and ask Jesus Christ to take him? He didn't know what kept him from that, but Satan knew very well, and laughed in triumph when the boy went to sleep without praying at all.

In the middle of the night Reuben opened his eyes, looked about him in the darkness, and wondered what noise that was that he heard. He raised himself on one elbow and listened. There were certainly people talking. It couldn't be that the family were just getting still for the night, for Reuben knew by the darkness that the moon was gone, and he knew it did not set until after eleven o'clock. It must be about midnight. But the talking was growing more distinct:

"Where can that confounded key be, anyhow?"

"He always hangs it by the sink. I've seen him do it fifty times when I've been here with milk."

"Well, he didn't do it the fifty-first time, anyhow, for it ain't here. I've felt all around."

"You better not talk so loud. First, you know, somebody will hear us."

"Somebody can't. That's Rupert's room over the kitchen, and I told you before we started that he was five miles away, out in the country. Shut that door! I'm going to risk a match."

All this Reuben heard as plainly as though he was in the kitchen. It took him much less time to hear it than it has taken to tell it, and all the time he was thinking fast.

This was the way it looked to him: Somebody was in the kitchen hunting for the key to the barn. They either meant to steal Samson altogether, or run away with him for a stolen ride that night. Another thing he knew, that he was the last one who had the barn key, and he hung it across the room from the sink, over behind the closet-door. He had come to the sink to hang it up, and Hannah had said: "You can't get here now; put the key on the hook behind the door; Rupert does sometimes."

How did those fellows get into the kitchen? The door was open, for he had heard the order to shut it. He knew something about that, too. He could see himself sitting by the kitchen window, and Hannah asking him if he wasn't going to bed to-night, and saying she was going to lock up now. Then he had said with a sudden start:

"O, Hannah, the kitchen key is upstairs in my room! You gave it to me this morning, you know, to unlock the washroom-door, and I carried it up there. I'll run and get it."

And Hannah had answered:

"No, you needn't. I'll slip the bolt. It's better than the key, anyhow."

But she must have forgotten to slip the bolt.

Now, how did he come to be in the room over the kitchen, hearing all this? Why, Mrs. Barrows had said just before he went up to bed:

"It's bitterly cold to-night. Reuben, I think I will send you to Rupert's room to sleep. That little north room where I put you is pretty cold, and it is nice and warm in the kitchen chamber. Rupert won't be back until to-morrow night."

So Reuben, though he said that he did not mind the cold, and the little north room was splendid, went off well pleased to the hired man's comfortable quarters, and rejoiced that Rupert had been given a holiday, and gone into the country to see his mother.

That was the way he came to be last at the barn, and to know about the key.

Don't you know how fast people can think? All this flashed through Reuben's mind with the speed of lightning. And he took time to think how strange it was that all these little things that seemed to have nothing to do with it at all, should have happened, one after another, so that he knew the whole story. More than that, he knew what he meant to try to do. To go down the front stairs and knock at Mr. Barrows' door, and carry on a conversation with him, would be very likely to warn the thieves, if they were thieves, and they acted like it. Then they would slip away with whatever they

chose to carry, and no one would be the wiser. The family might think he dreamed out the whole story. And perhaps the thieves would come the next night and carry out their plans. He would do no such thing as that.

He slipped out of bed, and pushed up his little window. Below him was the roof of the outer kitchen, or shed; easy enough for a sure-footed boy like Reuben to let himself down to that, and swing off to the coal-box below, and from there to the ground. What then? Why, then he had the kitchen key in his hand, and the visitors had shut the door. What was to hinder him from slipping around and making them prisoners, by turning the key in the lock? The windows he knew were secured by strong shutters, the fastenings of which had a trick of not opening, save for those who knew how to touch just the right spring. Gracie had amused herself for fifteen minutes on Saturday, by watching him try to find the secret of that spring. Reuben thought of that as another little thing that had been planned to fit this night's work. He was out of the window like a cat, not even waiting for clothes; waiting only to get the key from the little table where he had brought it and laid it when he went to the north room for his jacket. Why he brought the key back with him he did not know. He was down now on the frozen ground. It was bitterly cold, and his little shirt was none of the warmest. He wished he had wrapped himself in a quilt, but that would have hindered his quick, light steps perhaps. His

bare feet made no sound on the snow, and in a minute more he stood before the kitchen-door, key in hand.

Could he find the keyhole? Would the key slip in easily without noise! What if the fellows inside should hear him, and should rush to the door and open it, and seize him, and choke him before he could cry out?

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE LITTLE HOUSE AT HOME.

"HARK!" said a voice inside. "What was that?"

"The wind, I s'pose; I didn't hear anything. I say, Jim, what a coward you are! If I'd known you was so scarey I'd never have undertaken this job with you."

"Well, hurry up, or the undertaking won't do you any good. I don't believe the key is here at all. That horse is a vixen, anyhow. He won't let us touch him, I don't believe. What ails them matches? Why don't they burn?"

"I don't believe he will," said Reuben to himself, in answer to their remark about Samson. "So you are after *him*, you scamps. I'm glad I hung the key where it doesn't belong. Now for getting back."

The fact was, the little noise one of them had heard was the turning of the key in the lock. It slipped into place as noiselessly as anybody could wish, turned with just the least bit of a click, which the wind might have made in a dozen ways, and Reuben drew it out again, and tiptoed over the snow, climbed to the coal-box, wound his spry young limbs around the gutter-pipe, scuttled over the shed roof, and was back in his room again in a jiffy. Moving

very softly still, not waiting for clothes even yet, but wrapping himself in the grand overcoat that had kept him warm all day, he opened the hall-door, and felt his way down the hall to the front stairs, down those stairs and another hall, carefully feeling his way, and knocking softly at last at what he guessed was Mr. Barrows' room.

There was no answer, and he had to knock a little louder.

"Halloo!" came at last from inside. "Who's there? What's the matter?"

"It's me," said Reuben, in a soft whisper. "Won't you please to let me in? I want to speak to you?"

A few words of talk inside, a little waiting, and then Mr. Barrows threw open the door.

"What's up, my boy? Are you sick?"

"No, sir," said Reuben, stepping inside and quietly closing the door; "but there's somebody in the house."

"Oh, no," said Mr. Barrows; "I guess not. You've been dreaming and got frightened." And Reuben knew by the sound of his voice that he was smiling.

"No, sir," said Reuben. "It's them that are scared, I guess, or will be pretty soon. I don't think they know yet. They're in the kitchen, sir, hunting for the barn key; and I've locked 'em up, only they don't know it."

"In the kitchen! Who are? You've locked them up! Are you talking in your sleep?"

And Mr. Barrows fumbled for his matches, touched

the gas jet, and took a look at the boy done up in an overcoat, and with bare feet and legs.

"No, sir," said Reuben again; and he giggled in spite of himself. He knew he looked funny. "It's quite a long story, sir. I heard 'em. I know they are there, and I don't quite see how they can get out until you or I let 'em. There's the key. They waked me up talking over their plans, and I knew I had the kitchen key, so I slipped down the roof and locked the door. They thought I was the wind, and kept on hunting for the barn key."

A more astonished-looking man than Mr. Barrows it would be hard to find. There was much about the story that he did not understand, but it was plain to be seen that Reuben was wide awake, and knew what he was talking about. So, without more ado, Mr. Barrows hurriedly dressed himself, Reuben quietly stepping into the hall.

"Better go upstairs, my boy," Mr. Barrows said as he passed him. "You have done your share; and if the scamps are young fellows, as I suspect, it will be better for you not to appear."

"I'll wait here," said Reuben, taking a seat in the hall.

Mr. Barrows went on through the hall, through the dining-room, stopping there to turn on the gas, which, when the door was opened, would send a flood of light into the kitchen. Then he quietly opened the door, and said: "Well, boys, good morning!" and took a seat.

Reuben, listening, thought he would give almost

anything to see their faces just then. He heard their smothered exclamations of dismay and terror, and their dash for the door, which, of course, was locked, to their utter confusion.

Just what passed in that kitchen after that Reuben does not know to this day. He heard the voices, low and steady, but could catch no word. By-and-by he heard the key turn in the lock, heard Mr. Barrows say "Good-by!" and then presently he came back to the hall.

"You have done a grand night's work, my boy," he said, placing his hand on Reuben's head; "one that you can be glad about for ever. Those fellows meant to take Samson and have an all-night frolic. They would have ruined him, without doubt, but they would have done worse than that. Samson is a good horse when people know how to manage him, and a bad one when they don't. They would have taken the whip to him, and then he would have been unmanageable at once, and the probability is they would have been killed. Now come where it is warm, and let me hear the whole story of how you found them out." And he led the way to the sitting-room.

"I don't suppose they meant to *steal*!" Reuben said in an inquiring tone.

"I don't suppose they did," said Mr. Barrows. "At least they didn't call it that; and yet you see they were preparing to steal the use of my horse; and they stole the last hours of the Sabbath-day for their own pleasure. In point of fact, they were thieves, the worst kind of thieves: stealing from

God. People often fail to call things by their right names. Is your question decided yet, my boy?"

"No, sir," said Reuben, looking down.

And then Mr. Barrows caught sight of his bare feet, and sent him to bed with directions to sleep as late as he could in the morning.

But when Reuben had tucked himself into bed again, it seemed to him that his eyes were wider open than they had ever been before. He went over every little circumstance connected with the night, and wondered for the twentieth time who those fellows could be. He thought of all the little things that had happened beforehand to make it possible for him to prevent the mischief.

"Exactly as though somebody who knew all about what was going to happen, had planned all the other things and made them fit," he said.

And then he gave a little start and his eyes seemed to grow bigger as he remembered that God knew about all things before they came to pass. Another thought made his cheeks grow red. Mr. Barrows had called the fellows thieves, and said they stole from God. Had not his teacher said that day that he belonged to God? Had he not stolen himself from God, and used his time and his strength as he pleased? Was it possible that he, Reuben Watson Stone, was a thief?

"I'll give myself back to Him," he said, decidedly "I'll never steal another hour. I'll decide the question now, this minute. And I'll tell Him so, and ask Him to take me."

A second time on that cold winter night did Reuben Stone hop out of his warm bed. This time it was to get on his knees.

In the little house at home, things were not getting on any too well during Reuben's absence. The mother was secretly very much astonished over the number of things that one small boy could do to make the days pass more easily. She had not known before just what a help and comfort her "man of the house" was.

But missing him was not the only trouble. Work suddenly grew very scarce. Whether all the boys in the world were supplied with shirts, Mrs. Stone did not know. She only knew that when she carried the last bundle back, a thing she was not used to doing—it was two years since Reuben had allowed her to carry any bundles through the streets—the foreman told her the package to carry home would be lighter; that he had only a very small one; work was scarce, and it had been as much as they could do to divide it among their faithful workers so as to give all some. This made Mrs. Stone look very grave. It was as much as they could do to get along when she sewed every minute; and the very little that Reuben had been able to earn—so little that she had not supposed she could miss it, was really missed a great deal. She walked home very slowly, saving the five cents that it would have cost to ride part of the long way in the street-car, and tried to contrive some way to save money, or to earn a little more. To make matters worse,

what did Beth do but meet her at the door with news:

"O, mother the agent has been here and given notice that the rent on this house will be raised a whole dollar the first of next month!"

"A whole dollar!" repeated Mrs. Stone. "Then we must starve."

And then she did what Beth had never seen her do before, she sat down in the little sewing-chair behind the stove and cried. This was only two days after Reuben went away. From that time mother and daughter scrimped and pinched, both with coal and potatoes, and tried in every possible way to save a penny.

Miss Hunter was just as good as she could be, and had invited them twice to dinner, and once to tea, but the second time Mrs. Stone would not go.

"We can't invite her back," she said grimly to Beth; "and she does it out of charity, anyhow. I ain't used to charity. You can go if you want to, child; but her nice white bread would choke me."

But Beth wouldn't go without her mother, not even to save an evening's meal.

So it was not much that Miss Hunter could do for them. In fact, she could not find out how much they needed doing for, though she suspected, for Beth's eyes were often red. She knew, too, that work had failed, but that was no more than had happened to her, skilled workwoman that she was. She shed no tears over it for two reasons: In the first

place, she had a snug little bit of money laid aside for future use; and, in the next place, it gave her time to make over the blue merino into a perfect fit for Beth. She got the exact measure by offering to cut out a calico for her that the mother was making out of hers.

"There's that ten dollars, mother," reminded Beth as they sat together in the evening, talking drearily about the future.

"Yes," said Mrs. Stone, but she spoke gloomily.

She didn't often feel so dreary, but it seemed a dreadful thing to have work fail her, and rent raised the same week. It was Sunday evening, and they had passed a dreary day. A good deal of it had been spent in bed. To be sure, Beth went to Sunday-school with Miss Hunter, and in her new calico, and lovely fur cape and hood, looked as neat as wax. Miss Hunter would have liked her to wear the blue merino, but she had not found a good excuse for giving it to her yet. She was waiting for Reuben to come back to make a smooth road for so nice a present.

"If I'd known about her birthday, and had it ready, I might have given it to her then," she said, meditatively. "But then, dear me! I wasn't acquainted with them then. Besides, if I had been, I wouldn't have found out it was her birthday. It is so queer in the little chick to talk about Reuben's birthday, when she was born herself the same day and hour. It shows what an unselfish little thing she is."

After Sunday-school, which Beth had not liked as well as Reuben did his (she had sat beside two little girls who whispered and giggled over the queerness of wearing fur hoods and capes and calico dresses), she found the fire out and her mother in bed.

"It went out," the mother said, raising herself to speak to the little girl; "and I thought I would let it go until it was time to get something to eat. It would save coal, and the coal is getting very low. Come and lie down and take a nap."

But Beth had slept well all night, and her eyes were wide open. The last thing she wanted to do was to take a nap. She thought of the glimpse she had had into Miss Hunter's cheery room, and a great longing came to her to sit down inside, and read her Sabbath-school book.

"Mother," she said, "couldn't I go into Miss Hunter's room? She asked me to come; and it is so nice and warm in there!"

But the mother answered her sharply: "No, child, no! Don't beg fire until you have to. Come and lie down."

So Beth, with a sigh, had laid away her hood and cape, and slipped under the quilts beside her mother, and lay very still so that the mother could sleep, but did no sleeping herself, and wished the dreary day was done, and that Reuben was at home again. It seemed at least a month since he went away. So this evening they sat drearily over the dying coals, and Beth reminded her mother of Reuben's ten dollars.

"Yes," the mother had said. "I wanted to keep that to buy you and Reuben some spring clothes. I don't know how you are to get along without some. He is just in rags, and he outgrew every single thing he had last summer; but it will have to go, of course, for coal and rent; and then, how long will it last? Ten dollars isn't a fortune, I tell you. If I don't get more work this week, I shall have to spend some of it right away; for these shirts won't buy potatoes and salt enough to last us through the week."

"Mother," said Beth, after another gloomy silence, "don't you truly think anything at all will come of Reuben's going out there to stay a week?"

The mother gave a provoked little "Humph!" as a beginning to her answer.

"Of course not! What could come of it? He is nothing but a child. Small for his age, too. I don't see what possessed me to let him go off like that. I've had my pay for it. I haven't slept two good hours a night since he has been away. If he only gets home safe, without learning any dreadful habits, I shall be satisfied. It was a wild idea to think of our moving away out there. Where would we get the money to move? And just as though anybody would let us have a house without paying for it beforehand!"

"But the man said we could earn it," persisted Beth.

"Oh, yes; the man said a great many things. He took a fancy to Reuben, and felt good-natured just then, and thought he would be doing him a kindness to let him take a little journey; and he knew well

enough, I suppose, that Reuben would find out he couldn't do the work, and would come home satisfied. I hope he will. I never want him to go out of my sight again."

Poor Beth sighed, and proceeded to covering the coals and making ready for bed as her mother directed. But for all that talk, she couldn't quite get over her faith in Reuben's journey, and her belief that something would come of it.

It was high time for something to come; for on Monday morning the shirts were carried home, and, behold, there was not one to carry back again.

"Dreadful slack times!" the foreman said, and he spoke as though he was really very sorry. "We've never seen tighter times since we've been in the business. Had to turn away a good many of our hands three weeks ago. We've hung on to our best ones as long as we could. And you shall have work again as soon as we have it, maybe in three or four weeks, maybe not so soon. The pinch won't last long: it never does. Keep up a stout heart."

Yes; but on what? Three or four weeks was time enough to starve and to freeze. Mrs. Stone did not really expect to do either. She believed she could beg enough to save her from death. She believed that cheery Miss Hunter, who had already been so very good to them, would find some way to keep them from starving. Why, for the matter of that, there was the ten-dollar gold piece, and the rent not due yet for a week. A good many things might happen in a week. But Mrs. Stone was not in the mood

to cheer herself without any hope of the future. It all looked as dark as night to her. She did not cry again; but she went around her room with so sad a face that Beth cried whenever she looked at it.

Once the child ventured a suggestion: "Mother, Reuben said he would come on the first train. He will be here by dinner-time. Won't he be real hungry?"

"I suppose so; but we must give him some of the baked potatoes and bread. I don't dare to spend a cent for butter now, or meat. We must save for the rent, child, or we'll be turned out into the street. This is a strange time to raise poor folks' rent."

It was just at that moment that the train which was bringing Reuben home, steamed in at the depot three miles away.

CHAPTER XX.

A GENERAL SURPRISE.

REUBEN jumped from the platform just as the engine gave its final yell. His cheeks were red as roses, and his eyes were bright. He had been gone a whole week, and what a week it had been! He looked taller and larger in every way than the boy who left that dépôt a week before. Not that he had grown so very much, but it is wonderful how much larger a thick, heavily lined, well-fitting overcoat, buttoned up to the chin, makes a boy look.

He had Miss Hunter's flowered satchel on his arm; it was full, too—he couldn't imagine of what. "Some lunch for you," Mrs. Barrows had said, and smiled as she gave the heavy satchel into his keeping. But the boy had not needed a lunch for a two hours' ride, and had concluded not to open the satchel until he got home. He signalled a down town street-car the first thing, and took his seat: he was in too much of a hurry to walk; and besides, the satchel was wonderfully heavy.

He took out his pocket-book to pick out five pennies for the fare; and his face grew redder and his eyes shone brighter; whenever he thought of that pocket-book he laughed. Grace Barrows had

given it to him, "to remember their ride by," she told him, and within it was a wonderful paper, an envelope. This envelope Mr. Barrows had given him just as he started away. "Put it in your pocket-book, my boy," said he, "and don't open it on the cars; it is never a wise thing to handle money on the cars. It is yours, every cent of it. You will need it to help move your family. I wouldn't bring the stove if I were you, nor some of the other things that will cost more than they will come to; better sell them. The things in the house are all a present to you from Mrs. Barrows, but the money in this envelope isn't a present; it belongs to you. If you hadn't picked up that paper I should have offered a reward for its return; and my horse that you saved for me is worth a good deal of money. So you have fairly earned what you will find here. You just send me a telegram on what day you will get started, and we'll have a fire in the house and supper going, so your mother will feel at home; and now good-by, sir, and success to you!" And Mr. Barrows had shaken hands with him as though he were already a man. He laughed again over that white envelope, carefully sealed. What if there should be as much as ten dollars in it! If there only were, he could see his way clear towards moving right away. Then he fell to wording his telegram. Suppose mother could get ready to go this week! Suppose it should be on Thursday; a good deal could be done in two days and a half; then he would telegraph: "Dear Mr. Barrows: We will come on Thursday morning on

the train that leaves here at twenty minutes after ten." He counted the words, and was amazed to find that there were twenty of them. How did people ever say anything with *ten* words, which he knew was the usual number for despatches. He tried again and again; the first message didn't suit him anyway; it didn't sound business-like. He had stood by and listened to the reading of business despatches many a time, and admired their short, sharp sound. By the time the car turned into Ninth Street and he knew that he must leave it at the next corner, he had his despatch planned in a way that delighted his heart. "We take the twenty A.M. train Thursday." "It sounds just like 'em," he said half aloud in his glee, as he pulled the strap.

A brisk walk of five minutes or so, and he was at home. The fancy came over him to knock at his mother's door, and Beth opened it, and stood a moment and stared, and said, "Mother!" and then said, "Oh, oh!" and put both arms around the young man's neck.

"I thought you were a messenger boy; I was so *scared* because of your coat," she explained, breathlessly. "Why, Reuben, where *did* you get your coat? O, mother, isn't it splendid?" And the mother who had never really hoped to see her son in anything so fine, and warm, and beautifully fitting, could not help laughing a little too.

"You are just in time for dinner," explained Beth; "but I hope you are not awful hungry; or no—

yes, I hope you are, *dreadful* hungry, because then just potatoes will taste good; we haven't a speck of meat."

"I don't want meat," said Reuben, unbuttoning his coat; "I had steak for breakfast, plenty of it; but then maybe I've got some in my lunch. You pitch into the lunch, Beth, and see if there is something good for dinner." Whereupon he unlocked Miss Hunter's satchel, and Beth began to draw out the treasures, with little screams of satisfaction over them.

"Mother, here is a whole chicken, put in for Reuben's lunch! And oh, here is a pie, two pies tied together, just slipped in whole, on the pie-plates! And here is a loaf of bread. O, mother, mother! here is a cupful of the sweetest-smelling butter you ever saw!"

"I guess it is!" said Reuben, in intense satisfaction, "their butter tastes just like the roses that you smell as you pass the greenhouse on North Street. I'm awful glad they sent you some."

It was a splendid dinner that they at last sat down to; the potatoes were done to a nicety, and the cold chicken, and pie, and cheese and butter were a little better than any they had ever tasted before.

"I declare, we ought to have Miss Hunter in, to get some of these good things!" the mother said.

But Beth explained that she was up in mother Perkins' room, making her some tea and toast; she saw her go.

Then commenced Reuben :

"O, mother, do you suppose Miss Hunter will move with us? She could get ever so much more work there, and better wages, a good deal better; Mr. Barrows told me to tell her so, and to urge her to come. He said now was her time to get in with some of the best."

Beth looked up quickly at her mother, to see how she took this matter-of-course way of speaking of moving, and turned to the man of the house with her startling bit of news:

"O, Reuben, don't you think they have raised the rent of this house one whole dollar a month!"

"Raised the rent!" said Reuben, in great contempt; "I hope they will get it, or else I hope they won't. Anyhow, I know they won't from us. But I do wish Miss Hunter would go with us: there is a room in the house that would be just right for her."

"Reuben," said Beth, the colour coming and going on her face, "do you really and truly mean you think we are going to move?"

"Why, of course we are going to move. Haven't I been at work all the week getting things ready? Mother, could you go this week, do you think? There's lots of work there waiting; and Mr. Barrows needs me; and if they've raised the house rent here, the sooner we get out the better."

Mrs. Stone looked bewildered; she looked as though she didn't know in the least what to say to her eager-faced boy and waiting girl. She glanced from one to

the other a moment in a puzzled way; then she laughed. It was more than a week since Beth had seen her laugh.

"Reuben," she said, "I believe you are forty instead of ten. Do you really suppose we could get work right along if we were to move, and get a place to live in, and manage to pay the rent, and all that?"

"Why, mother, I *know* we could," he said, his bright eyes sparkling. "And I've seen the house we are to live in; fact is, I've rented it, and had it cleaned and all; and there is work waiting for all of us. The queerest little machines, Beth, you ever saw in your life! Brass, you know, with rows of tiny little teeth for you to put your needle through!"

"Put a needle through brass!" said bewildered Beth; and then Reuben laughed, and said he couldn't explain, but she would see for herself in a few days.

And then he began at his mother again about the moving, and with advice for her to leave the stove behind. Mr. Barrows advised it.

"Horrid old thing!" said Beth, bestowing glances of hatred on it; "I should be too happy to go away and leave it behind. Reuben, you can't think how hateful it has acted since you've been gone; twice as hateful as it does with you."

"I'll fix it to-morrow morning," said Reuben, nodding his head at it; "but, mother, don't you think it would be best to sell it for old iron? That

is what Mr. Barrows advised ; and, well, to tell you the truth—I was going to keep that for a surprise—he gave me a stove to use in the place of it ; one that goes better than that ! ”

“ He *gave you a stove !* ” said bewildered Mrs. Stone.

“ Yes, he did, ” said Reuben, his eyes dancing ; he concluded that there were surprises enough left without that one.

To tell you all the talk, and all the plans that there were made in the Stone family during the rest of that day, would make a book. Before three o'clock in the afternoon, Mrs. Stone was saying to herself :

“ If we *should* move, we ought to let the agent of this house know ; ” and by evening she said : “ We ought to let Mrs. Bemus know about this house ; I guess she would like to rent it. ”

Then Beth and Reuben looked at each other and laughed ; that showed them that their mother was decided to move. I must tell you, though, of one thing.

“ I don't know how we would ever get money enough together to buy what will have to be bought, and get ourselves ready ! ”

This was one of Mrs. Stone's objections. It made Reuben whisk out his pocket-book, over which Beth exclaimed in delight.

“ I've got some moving money here, ” he explained. “ It isn't a present, mother, Mr. Barrows said so ; he said it was rightly mine, because I had saved him

a good deal. I don't know how much there is; he sealed it up, and told me I had better not open it on the cars. But he said I would need it to move my family."

Then he broke the seal. Out came the bills—four of them. Reuben's breath began to come quick, and the flush on his face grew brighter. One bill was a five. What if some of the others should be!

"If there *should* be as much as fifteen dollars here," he said, stopping and looking at his mother, "what would you say?"

"I'd say that you must have worked most uncommon fast for a boy of ten," she answered, and her tone was not altogether one of pleasure. She did not fancy folks taking pity on them and giving them money.

Reuben laughed, and looked down at his money; he had a story to tell that he fancied would satisfy his mother, even if there should be fifteen dollars. But then he began to act very strangely. He gave such a sudden jump in his chair that Beth held to the side of the rickety table. Then he leaned his head on the table and actually burst into tears.

"Why, Reuben Watson Stone!" said Beth, "what *on earth* is the matter?"

"My dear boy!" said his mother; and she felt almost frightened, it was such a strange thing to see Reuben cry.

He came around to his mother and buried his head in her lap; but not until he had dropped the

four bills on the table before her, and she saw that there were two fives and two twenties. Fifty dollars!

I'm sure I wouldn't like to try to describe to you the commotion there was in that family for a little while.

Mrs. Stone was perfectly bewildered; to give a boy ten, or even fifteen dollars for a week's work, because a rich man felt sorry for him and thought he had a great burden to carry, would be unusual enough; but whoever heard of one giving a ten-year-old boy fifty dollars! She thought for a few moments that there was some wicked plot to ruin her boy, and almost expected to see a policeman appear and arrest him on a charge of stealing.

But Reuben's tears did not last long. He had been taken by surprise, and following hard on so much excitement, had forgotten his dignity, and cried it out with his head in his mother's lap.

Now he brushed back his hair from his hot forehead, wiped away all traces of tears, and told his remarkable story, beginning with the ride behind Samson, and the paper worth a thousand dollars that tried to blow away and didn't, and ending with the story of the locked kitchen-door and the two boys who were prisoners. It was a long story, and very well told. The mother who, when it began, was all ready to resent the fifty dollars almost as an insult offered to their honest poverty, by the time it was finished declared that she didn't know as fifty dollars was any too much to show his gratitude

As for Beth, she laughed and cried half a dozen times during the account, and half smothered Reuben with kisses when it was finished. This is the way in which the matter of expense of moving was settled, and by night the Stone family were actually packing! There was only one drawback. It didn't seem as though they could make up their minds to go and leave Miss Hunter behind. She had heard the whole story told over by Beth, and enjoyed it quite as much as that small lady thought she ought; and she had heard with pleasure about the room that would just suit her, and the chance for plenty of work at good prices. Then she had grown thoughtful, and finally had owned that she couldn't see her way clear to leaving poor old mother Perkins alone. To be sure she hadn't known her but a week, but the nice old lady was getting used to her, and liked to have her come in, and liked her toast, and relished an egg dropped in water, and was getting pretty feeble, and the long and short of it was, she didn't believe she ought to go and leave her.

"It is your duty to go, of course," she said to Mrs. Stone; "you've got Beth and Reuben to think of, or anyhow, he has you two to plan for, and he's done it like a man, I'm sure—a first-class man at that—and of course it is your duty to go along with him; like enough I'll come trotting behind after a little while; there is nothing in life hinders me but the poor old lady. But I can't make up my mind to leave her and that is a fact."

So Reuben and Beth felt doleful all one evening because Miss Hunter couldn't see her way clear to leaving mother Perkins. But they need not have wasted a sigh over that.

The fact was, their Father in Heaven saw the way clear all the time. He meant to have Miss Hunter go with them, and He knew exactly what to do for mother Perkins so that she should not miss the loving care of her new friend. I'll tell you what He did: that night in the silence and the darkness He sent His unseen angels, and they came without sound of footfall or rattling of keys; passed swiftly and silently through the door that Reuben himself had locked but two hours before, and when they passed out again they had mother Perkins with them.

In the morning Miss Hunter found her still body and her wrinkled old face lying just where she had left it the night before; but she came and called Mrs. Stone and Reuben and Beth.

"Look here," she said, her voice grave and yet sweet, "come up here; something has happened—something that we don't have a chance to see very often. Look at her face; did she ever smile like that when she lived here? I'm glad I kissed her last night when I tucked her up. The Lord must have touched her in a very little while after that. He left a little gleam of the glory right here on her face, so we could feel sure of what had happened. Well, Reuben, there's nothing to hinder my moving along with you now. Since the Lord wants her in the

palace, of course she doesn't need me to look after her any more."

So they all waited one day, and the funeral of mother Perkins was held in the sunny south room. Miss Hunter put a rose on the coffin that she bought of a small boy who passed by, and Reuben bought a flower that he saw in a greenhouse window.

"It looked so kind of sweet," he said, "I couldn't help it; it only cost three cents. Will it do to put with the rose?"

"Why, it's a bit of live for ever!" declared Miss Hunter, "and, seeing she's gone up there to live for ever, it is the very thing."

So there were flowers and tears at mother Perkins' funeral.

And the very next day the man of the house moved his family to the country.

CHAPTER XXI.

SHOW YOUR COLOURS.

REUBEN'S telegram was sent; you may be sure of that. A boy like Reuben Watson Stone is not likely to forget his first telegram. So when the stage drew up with a flourish at the little house, Reuben saw with delight the smoke issuing from the chimney. Then, oh! what fun he had taking his mother and Beth and Miss Hunter through the pretty rooms—hearing their exclamations of surprise and delight: seeing Beth try to hug the stove, though it was so hot she couldn't, and declare that she would like to kiss that tea-kettle which didn't leak; hearing his mother question in a bewildered way as to how he came to have this, and who thought of that! When that busy, happy evening was done, and Reuben was fairly settled in his new bed, it seemed to him that he had never been so happy in his life.

The excitement kept at white heat all the next day. Reuben had a holiday from the shop in order to help his mother get settled, though, truth to tell, the settling had been so thoroughly done for her before she arrived, and she had so few possessions, that the work was not hard. But there was the box-shop in all its departments to take the wonder-

ing Beth through—explaining to her in detail with the confidence of one who had been familiar with the business for years—and the glove factory, in which she saw the wonderful little machine with brass teeth, and discovered that she was to put her needle between them, instead of through them. He had also to introduce his mother and Miss Hunter to the glove factory, where they hoped to get work; and to crown the eventful day, Mrs. Barrows came with Grace to get acquainted with his mother, and was as friendly as though she had known her for years. The next day they all went to work in earnest.

The first Sabbath in the new home was one to which Reuben always looked back with a special feeling of interest. A great many things happened for him to remember. In the first place they all went to church together, and sat in a pew which Mr. Barrows told Reuben they better keep for their own if they liked it; and when he with blushing cheeks asked how much it would cost a year, he took a new lesson in church work on being told that pews in this church were not rented; that people selected their seats and paid what they could for the support of the church. He told his mother before they were fairly out of the building, and she had answered heartily: "That is something like. We can pay a little something ourselves; I've always sat in the gallery, and felt like a pauper; if they've found a way of making poor people at home in their churches, I'm glad to hear it." Then Reuben had taken Beth

to Sabbath-school, and put her in Grace Barrows' care; and in her new blue merino which Miss Hunter had at last contrived an excuse for giving her, and her fur cape and hood, she looked as well in his eyes as the best of them. In fact, he told his mother that their Beth was certainly the prettiest girl in the class. In his own class there had been much to think about and remember. Almost the first question his teacher asked was, whether he had remembered his promise of the Sabbath before, and when he, with eyes that drooped a little in embarrassment, had still answered firmly that he had remembered, and also that he had decided the question, he never forgot the glow in her eyes as she held out her hand to him, and said, "I am very glad. Now, my boy, remember this: Show your colours everywhere." He thought about this sentence a great deal during the lesson. What chance was there for him to show his colours, he wondered. He was not quite sure what she meant; he thought he would like to know, and he waited a little for Beth, and also in the hope that she would speak to him again after the school was closed. Sure enough she turned to him with that bright, glad smile, and asked him one of those direct questions.

"Are you going to do it?"

"Do what, ma'am?"

"Why, show your colours everywhere and always."

Reuben looked down at his plain grey clothes: very little colour about them, and that little rather

dingy ; he had not even a bright necktie, like some of the boys.

"How'll I show them if I haven't got 'em?" he asked at last, a glimmer of a smile on his face. He knew that Miss Mason did not mean that sort of colour ; but he was puzzled all the same to know what she did mean.

"Reuben, you know something about soldiers?"

"Yes'm." And Reuben's thoughts went back in a twinkling to the story of his great grandfather and his brave fighting, and his hat shaped like George Washington's ; his mother had entertained his and Beth's childhood with stories that she had heard while sitting on her grandfather's knee.

"Well, don't you know they wear their country's colours? A uniform, we call it ; and when we see them, we are never at a loss to know which side they are on, because their colours tell us instantly. Now the Lord Jesus Christ has called you to be a soldier, and you have accepted the call ; and I say to you, be sure you wear His colours always. Let nobody doubt on which side you are."

A bright, pleased look came into Reuben's eyes. This was a new thought to him : that he was really a soldier, like his great-grandfather, of whom his mother had told him dozens of times he had reason to be proud. It was nice to think he wore the colours of his Captain. He understood almost in a flash what Miss Mason meant.

"Yes'm," he said, his voice showing his gladness ; "I'll try for it."

She saw that he understood her, and was turning away with a smile ; but she turned back. "And, Reuben, one thing more : remember your Captain has had your orders written out for you in a book, and He expects you always to look for direction as to what He wants done. You can talk with Him, to be sure, at any time ; but after all, you can hardly expect Him to repeat to you directions that you might find by looking for them in your order-book."

"That's the Bible !" said Reuben, and his eyes flashed. "I never thought of it ; thank you, I'll remember."

Did he walk with a sort of martial tread as he went down the aisle to meet the waiting Beth ? He understood for the first time that he was a soldier.

They sat together, he and Beth, that evening, in the pretty little parlour. It was so funny for the Stones to have a parlour ! This little speck of a room was the most delightful spot that Reuben and Beth knew anything about. It chanced to be a mild day, and the door leading into the neat kitchen had been thrown open all day ; besides, the sun had shone in at the east window all the morning, so there was a pleasant warmth in the room, and here sat Beth and Reuben together, reading their Sabbath-school books. At least, Beth was reading ; Reuben had closed his book, and was deep in thought. The story had been about a Christian girl who had prayed for, and talked with, and worked for, her brother, and led him at last to give his heart to Jesus. It made Reuben think of his sister. Ought he to talk to her ? He had prayed

for her all the week. Indeed, it was the first thing he thought of that Monday morning when he prayed: how much he would like to have Beth understand about this new, sweet feeling that had come into his heart. Ever since her name had come into his prayer as naturally as his own. Still, all this week he had not said a word to her on the subject. This astonished him a little; he always told Beth everything: she had heard about the boys in the shop, and the spoiled pasteboards out of which he meant to make his fortune, and the two tickets to see the pictures, and—well, everything that had had to do with the eventful days during which he had been separated from her; everything but this one experience: his talk with his teacher, his promise to her, the thought he had given to it all that Sabbath afternoon, the kneeling down in the solemn midnight, and the strange new feeling with which he arose, and that had been with him ever since. In regard to all these things he had been entirely silent. He was surprised to find that he shrank from telling Beth anything about it. Why should he? Reuben did not know then so well as he afterwards learned about the enemy who longed for nothing so much as to keep him from showing this new spirit to Beth, and enlisting her at once as a soldier in the same army. To-night, as he sat staring into the twilight, thinking of the book he had been reading, of Miss Mason's words about showing his colours, of his promise to try for it, there came suddenly to his heart this question:

“Are you showing them to Beth? Does she know

anything about this new Captain of yours? Suppose you had never mentioned Mr. Barrows' name to her during all these days, what would you think of yourself?"

"Oh, but Mr. Barrows has done so many things for me: I *had* to mention him." And then did Reuben's cheeks glow for very shame! Did he really mean that this new Captain had done nothing for him? Oh, no, no! He could never mean that; for Reuben had thought about it a great deal during this week, and he felt very sure that it was this great Captain of his who had been leading him in these strange new ways. All his life, perhaps, but certainly on that night in which he took that awful ride with Spunk and Spunk's master, and felt himself directed where to go, and what to do, and the weeks that had followed had been no less wonderful! Oh, yes; Reuben was very sure that a great deal had been done for him. Then why didn't he tell Beth about it?

He resolved that he would.

"Beth," he commenced, "it is too dark to see to read any longer, let's talk."

"Well," said Beth, closing her book promptly, "talk!"

But all that Reuben did was to sit and stare out of the window.

"Why don't you talk?" said Beth; "lots of things must have happened to you since we had a long talk last."

"There have; great big things. I'm trying to think where to begin."

"Begin at the biggest thing of them all and come on down, and tell me all about it."

"The biggest thing that ever happened to me in my life," said Reuben, speaking slowly and gravely, "is that I've got to be a soldier, and have got a Captain, and wear His colours, and am bound to obey Him, just exactly, every time."

"Reuben, what in the world are you talking about?" said Beth, and she dropped her book on the floor and came and sat on the edge of the chair that was in front of Reuben's own, and stared at him, astonishment in her voice, and astonishment in her face.

"Why," said Reuben, fidgeting a little, "that's it, you see; I don't know how to tell you. It's a long story, that is, it's long to think it, but when you come to tell it there doesn't seem to be much that a fellow can tell. Look here, Beth, suppose you were walking down this road"—and Reuben arose and took careful steps on the pretty flowers in the carpet, towards the west window—"and you should meet somebody who said to you, 'I want you to turn right square around and go the other way,' and you should make up your mind to do it, don't you see how different everything would be right away?"

Whereupon Reuben turned and walked briskly towards the east window. Beth watched him wonderingly.

"I should want to be pretty sure who was talking to me, and what he wanted me to turn around for,

and what good it would do, anyway, before I should make up my mind to do any such thing," she said at last, seeing that Reuben seemed to be waiting for her to speak.

"Exactly," he said, coming back to his chair. "Well, the fact is, I found out that the One who met me wanted to do the best thing for me all the while, and knew what was the best, and *made* me, in the first place, and had a right to direct me which way to go; and I just turned around and made up my mind to follow Him the rest of my life."

"It must be you mean that you are a Christian!"

Reuben always remembered the great astonishment in Beth's voice as she spoke those words.

"I suppose I am," he said gravely—he had not put it into words before—"if a Christian means one who has made up his mind to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, take Him for Captain, you know, why, I'm one, sure."

"That is what it means," said Beth, nodding her head. "Miss Hunter told me so; she told me a good deal about it; she wanted me to go that same way, but I didn't think I wanted to do that; I didn't want to leave you behind; I wanted to keep right along with you and not go anywhere at all that you didn't; and now you've gone and left me!" And Beth dropped her head on her arm and began to cry softly.

"O, Beth, I haven't!" he declared, eagerly; "I've come back for you, don't you see? That's what I

am trying to tell you, I want you along. I couldn't be a soldier without you ! we've always been together. Girls can be soldiers in this army just as well as boys ; it's different from any other army. I say, Beth, won't you come right along ? That's the very reason I wanted to tell you about it to-night."

Beth had already dried her tears and was listening.

"What did you mean about hearing somebody speak to you and ask you to turn around, and all that ? I don't understand what you mean."

So Reuben began at the story of that midnight ride, part of which she already knew, and told her about the terror, and the horror, and the prayer, and the quiet that came to him, and the sense of somebody leading him, and he following just where the Somebody led ; and from that he jumped to the experiences of but the Sabbath-day before ; the lesson, and the teacher's question, and her talk with him, and his promise, and what hard work he had to keep it, and how Grace Barrows helped him along without knowing it, and how, finally, after midnight, he knelt down and settled it, and how he had been sure ever since of the presence and help of his Leader. Then he told how Miss Mason had reminded him that very day to be sure and show his colours.

"I wanted to show you, Beth, the first thing, and ask you to put them on."

It had been quite a long story ; the twilight faded out entirely while he talked and left the room dark

but for the glow of the firelight. Beth had listened in silence, but with the utmost attention. She drew a long sigh when he closed, and if Reuben could have seen her face it would have told him that she felt herself left behind.

"You've been converted," she said at last.

"Have I?" said Reuben; "I don't know. I don't even know what the word means."

"I do, Miss Hunter told me; she said there were two sides to it; God had one side, and folks the other. God called to people, asked them to *belong*, you know, just as you heard Him ask you—that is His side. Then they said either 'I will,' or 'I won't,' and that's their side; and she said even *God* couldn't do anything for them so long as they said 'I won't,' because He had promised Himself when He made them that they should have the right to decide things for themselves, and that was their side. Then she said just as soon as they made up their minds to say 'I will,' He put new feelings into their hearts, so that they wanted to do right, where before they hadn't cared, or hadn't thought anything about it; and all at once they knew that the thing they wanted most was to follow the Lord Jesus, and please Him, and she said that new feeling in their hearts was called being converted, and there wasn't anybody else who could do it only just God; and I know you have been converted."

"Well," said Reuben, after a very thoughtful silence, "I never heard it explained before, but it sounds like Miss Mason's talk, fits right in, and I

guess it is all true. I've often wondered what it felt like to be converted; I'm glad I know. I'll tell you what it is, Beth, you do your part, right away, won't you? so He can do His, and then we'll go on together."

"Does mother know?" asked Beth.

"No, she doesn't. I wanted to tell you first. Fact is, I don't know how to tell such things. Do you suppose mother will understand what I mean?"

"I guess so," said Beth; "she will have to be told, anyhow; for things will have to be different now, you know."

"How different?"

"Why, every way. We'll have to have reading in the Bible every night and morning, and kneel down and pray, and say a prayer at the table every time we eat."

"How do you know?" asked Reuben, very much startled. "Who could read in the Bible and pray? People don't always do that."

"Oh, they do," said Beth, confidently; "Miss Hunter told me about it. She told me about a bad man who was converted, and he began the next day to read in the Bible and pray, and they all knelt down, and everything was different; and you know, Reuben, you are the man of our house."

CHAPTER XXII.

HE TAKES A NEW STEP.

THERE was not time to answer Beth ; for there came a stream of light just then, from a new lamp, and behind it were mother and Miss Hunter ; and Reuben poked the fire, and added a fresh lump of coal, and the room looked lovely and cheery. He was glad for the interruption, for in truth he had no answer ready. Beth's ideas of the Christian life were very startling. Was it to be supposed that he, Reuben Watson Stone, could read in the Bible and pray before people !

What did Beth mean by saying " they always did it ? " Could she be right in thinking that because he was a Christian he must take up such duties as those ?

" Well," said Miss Hunter briskly, setting down the new lamp on a gay lamp-mat that she had fished from her box of treasures, " how did Sunday-school go ? Did you like it, Beth ? "

" Some," said Beth, absently ; and then, rousing herself, " Why, yes, ma'am ; I liked it very much. "

She was still thinking of Reuben's wonderful news.

" Miss Hunter," said Reuben, his thoughts

suddenly turned in a new channel, "do folks that sign a temperance pledge have to stop drinking cider?"

"Well, now, my boy, that depends on the kind of pledge they sign; there are some wishy-washy pledges I've seen, that left cider out, but why they should is more than I can understand. Why? Was that in your Sunday-school lesson?"

"No'm," said Reuben, with a little laugh, "not exactly, but something came up about pledges, and promises, and we got on to it somehow, and one of the boys said that cider belonged in the pledge, and another boy said it didn't; he said he had been a member of a temperance society for two years, and that he drank as much cider as he wanted; and they had quite a talk about it."

"And what did the teacher say?"

"Well, she didn't say a great deal about it; I guess she thought it wasn't in the lesson, and she wanted to get the boys to tend to that; but I don't believe she thinks much of cider."

"I'll warrant she doesn't; not if she is a good teacher, and knows much about boys. Why, Reuben, one of the worst drunkards I ever knew, learned to drink by sucking cider out of his father's barrel, through a straw! The idea of leaving it out of a *pledge*, when those who know say that it will intoxicate quicker than beer!"

"One boy said that there was a great difference in cider; that he thought every pledge meant you mustn't touch *hard* cider, but that new cider such as he drank, wouldn't hurt a cat."

"No more it wouldn't," said Miss Hunter, dryly. "because a cat knows enough not to touch it. I'll tell you what I think about sweet cider; I think it is just a snare of Satan; time and again he has got hold of a boy by making him so fond of sweet cider that he couldn't let it alone; and he knows it. Satan is real sharp, I tell you. Then there's another thing, Reuben: you must ask your boy who drinks as much sweet cider as he wants, if he has studied the thing up, and knows just when it changes, so that there is a little bit of alcohol in it. The fact is, that change comes a great deal sooner than most folks think. I've heard them that know say that sweet cider was really the flattest tasting stuff in the world; and that nobody liked it until the change had begun in it that makes alcohol. I should think that was stepping pretty near the edge of a promise, even if my pledge didn't say anything about sweet cider."

"I should think so too," declared Reuben. "I hadn't thought about it before, and I couldn't tell which side I was on; but I guess I'll let cider alone."

"Why, Reuben, you don't belong to any temperance society?" This from Ben, in an inquiring tone.

"No; but I'm going to. There's a fellow in the shop going to get all the signers he can to the pledge, and I told him to-day I'd sign the first thing to-morrow."

"That's right!" was Miss Hunter's hearty commendation. "And is it a cider pledge? If it isn't, I'd have another line added and poke it in somehow;

for I tell you it works more mischief to young folks than all the other drinks put together. I've watched it. Boys, and girls too, that have been brought up to do right, and be what they called temperance people, go on drinking their cider year after year, and every year they like it a little harder, though they don't say so: all they say is, 'Seems to me this cider tastes kind of flat; it's a little too new; it wants to stand awhile.' And the first thing they know, the harder it is the better they like it; and they like it so well they can't let it alone. Some of them do, you know; it doesn't affect everybody that way, of course; if it did, people would see the danger easier. But how are you going to know but you will be the very one to learn to like it too well?"

"And even if you don't, maybe the boy that stands next you will be the one to, and maybe he would let it alone if you would." This was Reuben's comment.

"Exactly so, my boy; do you see that cider is put into the pledge that you sign."

"I will," said Reuben.

Then suddenly Mrs. Stone started a new train of thought:

"There is something about this room makes me think of my old home: I can't tell what it is nor where it is, but the minute I get into it I think of the house we used to live in when I was a little girl, and especially the sitting-room where we used to sit on Sundays."

"Well, now," said Miss Hunter, with hearty

sympathy in her voice, "isn't that pleasant? I do think it is so nice to have something to remind us of our childhood. You must have had a real nice home if this reminds you of it, for I do think this is about as pleasant a room as I ever saw. And what did you used to do Sunday nights when the twilight was coming on?"

Both Reuben and Beth turned interested faces on their mother, and waited for her answer; they knew very little about her old home; she had never seemed fond of talking about it.

"Oh, we used to sing," she said, speaking slowly, as if it were hard work to go back to that long ago past. "There was quite a family of us once, and we were all singers: Reuben and Kate were first-rate singers—they were the two youngest—and father used to say they could earn their living with their voices; but they didn't need to earn a living. they both died before they found out what a hard thing it was to live. Father had enough and to spare in those days." And then Mrs. Stone gave the sort of weary sigh that Reuben and Beth were well acquainted with. Miss Hunter didn't want her to sigh.

"So they went to heaven to sing?" she said briskly, almost gaily. "Well, there's a pleasant side to that to look back on, I'm sure. Those things most always seem so sad when they first come. I've had them when it seemed to me I never in the world could feel it was for the best. 'I'll believe it,' says I, 'because the Lord says so,' and I used to tell Him that on my knees; 'but as for realizing it, I

don't think I ever can—not till I get to heaven.' And if you'll believe it, I've gone to Him on my knees and told Him since, that I saw it as plain as day about those very things; they were best! Well, I suppose, after the singing was done, somebody used to get out the old Bible and read, and then the father prayed: wasn't that the way of it?"

Mrs. Stone caught her breath hard for a moment, then, in a lowered voice, said:

"Yes, it was; my old father never used to neglect that."

There they were, right back to the subject that had put Reuben in such a whirl! This was great news to him; he had never heard so much about his grandfather before. Then his mother used to belong to a home where the Bible was read every Sunday evening, at least. He wondered if it was on other evenings; he wished he knew, but he did not like to ask his mother. At this point in his thoughts his eye caught Beth's; she nodded her head, and her face said almost as plainly as words could have done:

"I told you so; grandfather was a Christian, you see, and he read in the Bible and prayed."

"But then he was a man," said Reuben to himself.

"Well, what of that?" asked that other self, who often in these days held conversations with him. "So will you be a man if you live long enough; and you are the only man there is to this house now. You have to help pay the rent, and buy the coal,

and do ever so many things now that you wouldn't if you had a father. As likely as not you would be in school instead of working hard every day to support your family; why should you wait until you get to be a man before you read in the Bible and pray in your family, any more than you waited until then to do other things?"

"Mother might not like it," said Reuben.

"You will never know till you ask her," said the other self: "and you know you don't believe but what she will like it, or at least that she won't find any fault with it; she hardly ever finds fault with anything that you do."

"Maybe I'll do it next Sunday," said Reuben.

"I should think it would be a great deal more sensible to do it now," said his other self; "things don't grow easy by waiting; you know that, for you've tried it. In fact, this first Sunday in a new home, when everything is beginning over new in your family, is just the easiest time you will ever have. If I were you, I'd do it this very night. Your mother doesn't know, to be sure, that you have become a soldier, but Beth does, and you see what she expects of you; and your mother might as well hear it now as at any time. You wondered how you should ever have a chance to show your colours; are you going to shirk the very first chance?"

But at this point Reuben gave up the sort of thinking which consists in just holding an argument with one half of yourself against the other half, and set himself to right down earnest thinking.

The talk went on in the room, but he did not hear it. He had an important question to settle. It seemed strange to him that Beth, who was not a soldier at all, had been the one to rouse him to duty, and even point the way; but the more he thought about it, the more sure he felt that she was right, and that here was a chance to stand by his colours. It seemed like very hard work to him; you boys who have been in the habit of reading a few verses in the Bible with your mother, and then kneeling with her in prayer every night and morning of your lives, will probably never be able to understand how hard it was. But there was this about Reuben that made every one who knew him believe in him, and believe that he would make a man to be trusted. When he saw a plain duty he never shirked it because it was hard. He did not mean to shirk this one.

"Mother," he said, breaking into the midst of something that Beth was saying, being so intent on what he was about to say, that he had not heard Beth at all, and the earnestness sounded so plainly in his voice, that his mother turned toward him an expectant face, and waited: "Mother, I've had something to tell you for a week, but I haven't got it told. I've become a soldier, and I've got to stand by the colours all the time."

"A soldier!" repeated Mrs. Stone, in a kind of dismayed voice.

This boy of hers had so astonished her lately that she was prepared for almost anything. Had he told

her there was war with the Indians, and he must march away the next morning, I don't know that she would have been much more bewildered than she was now. It was plain that she did not understand him any better than Beth had, and it was equally plain that Miss Hunter did. Her eyes flashed a bright light at him, that made his heart feel warm, and he answered her smile, and then turned to his mother.

"Yes, mother, a soldier of the Lord Jesus. I'm bound to serve Him all my life; and since I'm all the man of the house there is, I was wondering if you would care if I read some verses in the Bible and prayed, as grandfather used to do. I never knew before that grandfather did so."

For the next minute or two it was so still in that little new room that you could have heard your own heart beat, I think. Then Mrs. Stone said, and her voice was so low that Reuben had to bend his head to hear it: "Of course I wouldn't care, Reuben, if you want to."

Without another word, Reuben reached for the Bible that he had been studying but a little while before, and read aloud the words over which he had been thinking that afternoon: "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.

"Thou therefore endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

"No man that warreth, entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."

There was a great deal about these verses that Reuben did not understand; indeed they had caught his eye because the word soldier was repeated several times, and then that last sentence about pleasing Him who had chosen him to be a soldier, gave him joy; Reuben was sure of this, that he wanted nothing now so much as a chance to please Jesus. During this reading he was much troubled as to what he should say when he knelt to pray. Remember, he had never heard his own voice in prayer, and indeed I may say he had rarely heard anybody pray. But he was much astonished to discover that words seemed to come to him without any trouble. Only a few simple sentences, but they expressed as plainly as words could, his resolution to belong to the Lord Jesus, and to serve Him in all things as well as he could from that time forth.

He felt very happy when he rose from his knees; somehow he could not help feeling more like a soldier than before; as though he had put on his uniform, you know; besides, there had been something in his mother's voice, low and husky though it was, which made him feel that she did not dislike the reading and praying. She had knelt very near to him, and he felt sure he had heard her crying.

Perhaps she was thinking of grandfather ; perhaps she had missed his prayers very much. And Reuben resolved that she should never miss prayers again. It hardly needed Miss Hunter's happy sentence, "Well now, I thank the Lord that I belong to a family altar once more," to make him feel that he had done the right thing, and that God would bless him in it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THEIR FIRST PARTY.

THERE was a good deal of excitement one evening in the new house where the Stone family lived. Something very interesting had happened. Beth and Reuben were invited out to spend the evening, for the first time in their lives. You boys and girls who have been to a children's party, or to an entertainment of some sort, as often as once a month, ever since you can remember, will be astonished at this, but it is true.

Hattie Turner, a young girl in Beth's Sabbath-school class, and her brother who was in Reuben's class, were to have a candy pull, with plenty of apples, and nuts, and games, and a good time generally, and Beth was braiding her hair in lovely silky braids, and tying it with blue ribbon to match her dress.

"You are too much dressed up for a candy pull, and that's a fact," her mother said, eyeing the blue merino with doubtful, and yet with satisfied eye. Beth did look so nice in it!

Miss Hunter came briskly to the rescue; there was an alarmed look in Beth's eyes; if she *should* have to take the blue merino off, and wear her brown

calico, she felt almost as though it would break her heart.

"Oh, she won't hurt her dress, that white apron covers the front nicely, and she can roll up her sleeves when she pulls candy, and she is kind of special company, you know, being so much of a stranger, so it will do for her to be dressed up pretty well."

Reuben couldn't help laughing a little as he looked down at his new grey jacket and pants, cut just the right length and trimmed with as many buttons as the rest of the boys wore. The idea of Beth being too much dressed up to go to a place was something so new, and so funny.

"She must match my new jacket and pantaloons, you know, mother;" he said gaily, and the mother privately thought that she would have to look very well indeed in order to match her boy.

Reuben's thoughts, busy with contrasts, went back to the old home. "I wonder what Kate and Timmy Blake would say if they could see us, Beth?" He asked the question with a sort of glee, but not in the tone that you would call a proud one.

"I wonder how poor Mrs. Blake has got along all this cold winter?" Mrs. Stone said, with a sigh for her old neighbour and one friend in the city. "Poor thing! I've thought of her a dozen times this winter, and wished she could have a little bit of the comfort that we are having so much of."

"Couldn't we have them down here for a few days, mother, and get them rested up? Maybe

Timmy could get work here ; Katie could, anyhow, and Mrs. Blake."

"Have company?" said Mrs. Stone, smiling at this new and not altogether unpleasant idea. "Maybe we can, Reuben, when the summer is fairly here. I doubt if they could get enough together to pay their fare though."

"Let's try for it," said Miss Hunter, nodding her head with the air of one who saw a way to accomplish it.

So Beth and Reuben started to their first party, their hearts warm with the thought of what they, in their happier lot, might do for their friends.

It was Miss Hunter who held the light at the side-door and waited while Beth went back for a handkerchief ; it was in this way that she got a chance to speak that last word to Reuben.

"I suppose you mean to look out for your colours to-night, my boy?"

Then Reuben looked down again at the neat grey suit, and the trim necktie with a dash of red in it, and smiled. He knew that Miss Hunter did not mean those colours, no danger but he would look out for them ; but he didn't quite see what she could mean.

"I don't know of any chance to show them to-night ; it is just a few girls and boys to pull candy, and eat apples and nuts. There won't be any way to show the colours that you mean."

"Humph!" said Miss Hunter, looking wise. "Don't you believe it. I never heard of a parcel

of boys and girls being together for half an hour, but what the Lord gave them a chance to show their colours. Why, Satan looks out for that, even if the Lord didn't. He is always putting in words and actions to help folks backwards, and them that won't go backwards and have a Captain strong enough to lead them forward, have a chance to follow him."

Reuben leaned against the side of the little table and looked thoughtful.

"But, Miss Hunter," he began, "these are not rough fellows like some of those in our shop; they are well-behaved boys, real gentlemanly fellows always, and the girls will be there, too; I don't believe I'll have any chances to-night."

"Just you keep watch and see if you don't. I've seen gentlemanly boys and nice girls set a whole nest of snares for careless feet. You make me think of a nephew of mine to whom I once gave the verse: 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.' He was going off to the woods with a party of boys. 'Auntie,' says he, 'the verse doesn't fit; there isn't a sinner among them; those boys are ever so much better than I am.'

"'You keep a look out, my boy,' said I; 'it's my opinion you'll find the sinners enticing you as hard as they can, before you are an hour older. You will have need for the verse if Satan is as smart as I have reason to think he is.' Well, in the evening he was pretty quiet and thoughtful; and when I got a chance I asked him about the verse. 'Auntie,' said he, 'it

just exactly fitted ; I found a whole troop of sinners right in my own heart enticing me as hard as they could ; I had to fight them with all my might ; it would have been so easy to have consented to what they wanted.' ”

“ Whew ! ” said Reuben, with a queer little whistle ; “ I never thought of that. ”

Then came Beth : “ I thought I should never find my hem-stitched one,” she said, in apology for having kept him so long. “ I put it away so carefully I could not think what I did with it. ”

“ You are not used to having places for things,” said Reuben, reaching for his cap, and feeling that Beth had been gone none too long for him to get his colours righted.

“ No,” she said, with a happy little laugh. “ For that matter, I'm not used to having things. But, Reuben, I'm getting used to it very fast. Now you know it isn't quite three months that we have been living here, and yet it seems to me as though I could not go back to the city and live in the old way : I think I should die. And it seems as though we had always known what we would have for dinner, and could always have meat once a day, and had never thought of such a thing as shivering over the stove to save coal. What makes people get used to things so fast, do you suppose ? It isn't that I've forgotten the hard places : I guess I haven't ! I wish I could, though ; I wouldn't like to have the girls know how hard we used to have it. ”

“ Why not ? ” said Reuben, wonderingly. “ I

should think you would like to have them know all about it, so they would understand better what hard times poor folks have, and what fun it is to help them. Why don't you?"

"Oh, because I don't," said Beth; and she tossed her pretty brown head, and looked and felt in a way that Reuben, not having a streak of that kind of pride about him, did not understand.

I suppose it would be difficult to describe to you how very much Beth Stone enjoyed the first part of her first evening out. The girls were disposed to be especially kind to her. The fact was, they liked the pretty little city girl, with her pale cheeks and delicate looks, and quiet, graceful ways, for Beth was one of those who had grown graceful by merely watching others at a distance. She had never had bright ribbons to wear in her hair before, nor a lace ruffle for her dress; yet she knew as well how to tie the ribbons, and just how high to baste the ruffle, as though she had worn them all her life. Hadn't she studied other little girls by the hour together? Well, the little girls at the candy pull studied her, and liked her much; so did the boys. They gathered around her and asked questions. She knew a great deal about the city, to which some of them had never been; she had used her eyes to good purpose, and could describe the park, and the fountain, and the great store on *Broadway* that was like a good-sized town in itself, and many of the other wonders, in a way that astonished the listeners—even Reuben, who hadn't an idea that Beth could talk so well. It seems

almost a pity that any other subject should have come up for discussion that evening.

It was Arthur Holmes who suddenly drew the interest to himself by this beginning: "Oh, I've got the richest thing to tell you. Halley Parsons has come home. Did you know he had come? I was up there yesterday and saw him. Well, you know little Teddy, the washerwoman's boy that Judge Porter is sending up there to school? You don't know him, Reuben, do you? A funny little chap who is smart with his books, and Judge Porter has taken a notion to him and sent him off with his son to school. Halley says they have the richest fun with him. He told me about one scrape this winter. They have big rooms in the boarding-house, with double beds, and cots or something, and that brings six of the fellows in a room. Well, Teddy, you know, joined the Church just before he went away. He's a real good little fellow, but he's an awful coward; and Halley, it seems, thought he would have some fun, and he told the boys in Teddy's room; and the first night they all talked and laughed a blue streak when they were getting ready for bed; they watched for Teddy's Bible to come out, because Halley had told them that he read in the Bible, and prayed every night, as regular as the minister. But it seems they were too much for him that night: he left the Bible in the bottom of his trunk. Finally, a boy named Case, who slept nearest to the gas-light, gave the word that it would be out in two minutes, and out it went. Almost, that is. He gave the other fellows a wink.

and left the least little glimmer of it - not so you would notice it at all, Hal said, but so he could turn it on again in a twinkling. Then, for a few minutes, everything was quiet, Teddy in bed with the rest. Pretty soon they heard a little softly motion, not more noise than a mouse would make. 'What's that?' said Case, and he turned on a blaze of light. There sat Teddy on the foot of his bed, shivering as though he had an ague fit. Then, Hal said, you ought to have heard Case tell how sorry he was that he turned out the light before Teddy was in bed. 'I didn't notice,' he said; 'I thought everybody was ready. I ought to have paid attention to you, when you were a new boy.' Then he offered to help him, and said it was a cold night, and finally he hopped out of bed and tucked poor Teddy up head and ears, and turned down the light again. Then all was still, and pretty soon some of the fellows began to snore as though they were asleep. Then they heard that little creeping noise again. This time Case waited until he knew by the sound that Teddy must be slipped off of the bed, then he flashed the light up, and there stood Teddy, shivering, and looking like a goose. 'I'd have given a dollar to have seen him!'

Here Arthur stopped to laugh, nearly all of his listeners joining in.

"Well, Case questioned him again, and he stammered and muttered something, wouldn't own, you know, that he wanted to say his prayers. Case was very sorry for him; was afraid he was sick; hoped he would be able to sleep, and all that sort of

thing, and tucked him into bed and turned out the light again, or rather didn't turn it out. After that, Halley said it was still so long that they began to think the little fellow had given up his prayers, or said them with his head ducked under the bed-clothes, and one or two of them were just dozing off to sleep when that mouse-like noise was heard again, and Teddy was evidently crawling out. This time Case waited until the youngster was fairly on his knees, in the middle of his prayer, maybe, then he flashed up the light, and all the fellows sat up in bed, and there was Teddy out on the cold floor with his bare feet, nothing around him, kneeling down, with his eyes tight shut, and his lips going as if he was saying forty spelling-lessons at once. Well, sir, Halley said you never saw anything so funny. He said if he had been expelled the next morning he'd have had to laugh. And all the boys just roared. Teddy, he hopped up and dashed into bed, and hid his head under the clothes, and Halley says they believe he cried half the night."

Now I really don't know how to account for the way in which those boys and girls listened to this story; there must have been among them those who thought that a shameful as well as a silly trick had been played on poor Teddy, yet every one of them joined in Arthur's laugh, save Reuben Watson Stone. He sat up straight, his cheeks red, his eyes flashing, himself so indignant, especially over the faint little giggle which Beth gave, that he could hardly control his voice enough to say: "Well, I must say

that a meaner trick in a small way, without anything to be got out of it, I don't know as I ever heard of, and I've heard of a good many. The newsboys and bootblacks are always getting up some sort of trick that is twice as bright as this, and not any meaner. If I were Halley Parsons I'd be ashamed of myself for telling it, and calling it fun. I didn't know that rich gentlemen's sons, that had chances to learn, and all that, were so mean."

Then the girls looked at one another, and at Beth, whose cheeks flamed now like peonies, two or three of the boys whistled; Stephen Miller said, "A lecture on Morals, one night only; admission two peanuts," and began to pass them around; then others of the boys and some of the girls laughed; Arthur Holmes said, "Pshaw! Nobody meant any harm; it was only a little fun; it didn't hurt the youngster, either; and he needn't have been such a coward as to be afraid to say his prayers, if he wanted to."

"That is true," said Reuben, in a quieter voice. He was already sorry that he had spoken so sharply, and did not believe that he would have done so if Beth had not given that little laugh. "That is true; I'm sorry the little fellow hadn't more pluck; but I must say I can't see the fun in a lot of older fellows doing a mean thing because a little one has done a silly thing. I don't know how you folks that have had chances argue about things; I've never been to school, and I've never had much to do with boys

who could go, but I know there isn't a street-boy in the city who would play so mean a trick on one of his own mates as that; they stick together, and try to help each other; and I supposed all boys did."

It had its effect on the boys, this frank confession that he had no chances, and knew more about street-boys than he did about those who were carefully taught in happy homes; had Reuben given his opinion without this explanation, there were those present who would have been rude enough to ask him where he got his education, what boarding-school he attended, or whether they taught manners in the box factory, or some such silly thing, to remind him that they were, most of them, boys whose fathers took care of them, and sent them to school, while he had to work hard for a living. As it was, they didn't know what to say. I think, perhaps, some of them were a little cross over Reuben's bold hint that the city newsboys and bootblacks were ahead of them in politeness, but they seemed at a loss how to answer him, and all were glad, I think, that just at that moment the candy was announced ready to pull.

But there was one little girl for whom the rest of the evening was almost spoiled, and that was Beth. It was not on account of that silly little laugh, though she was a good deal ashamed of it, or would have been had she given herself a chance to think. The story had not amused her at all; in fact she had thought it a shameful and stupid trick;

but the truth was, poor little Beth's pretty head was turned with a desire to be like other people. The boys and girls who had always worn nice clothes, and had gone out of evenings to candy pulls, and had pleasant times together in a hundred ways that were new to her, had laughed over the story, so she, Beth Stone, must needs do so; that is the way she reasoned. Of course, being in this frame of mind, Reuben's frank statement that he had never had any chances, or been to school like others, and that he was quite well acquainted with newsboys and bootblacks, and other dreadful beings like them, was like live coals dropped on her comfort. How *could* Reuben talk so! All these uncomfortable thoughts went racing through her brain as she pulled and pulled at her candy, determined to have hers the whitest strand in the room.

The talk went on gaily enough, and but for Reuben's noticing that most of the boys had very little to say to him, it would have been pleasant work to pull that candy. As it was, he found himself somewhat in the corner, working alone; not a boy but rather resented being told that he had laughed over a mean trick.

Still, I think the little cloud of discomfort would have blown over, and things would have settled into pleasantness again, if it had not been for the next thing that happened, after the candy was pulled, and much of it eaten.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW IT ENDED.

THE next thing was, that after sticky hands had been washed, and little wads of candy had been picked from chairs and carpet, and the company had all gone into the sitting-room for some games, the dining-room door opened, and black Nancy appeared with a large fruit-basket of apples in one hand, and balancing on her head, in a graceful way, the largest pitcher Reuben had ever seen.

"Oh, oh!" shouted John Stuart, who was a nephew of their host, "apples and cider! I forgot that we had any cider. Boys, I tell you, it is prime; just the right taste to it."

In a twinkling a row of sparkling goblets was arranged on the table, and brimmed with the beautiful amber-coloured cider.

"Doesn't it look too lovely for anything!" declared little Addie Parker, clasping her hands in a flutter of satisfaction. "I do love cider dearly, and we never have any at our house, because Aunt Fanny doesn't like it; so silly in her!"

"Why, can't you have anything at your house that your Aunt Fanny doesn't like?"

This question was asked in a very wondering tone by Arthur Holmes, and, while the others laughed, Addie explained:

"Oh, she doesn't approve of it, you know; doesn't like to have the boys drink it; she is afraid they will be drunkards;" and Addie's laugh rang out in a silvery way, as though becoming drunkards was a very funny thing; "so out of politeness to her, papa won't have it, because she is the housekeeper, you know, and he says she ought not to have in the cellar what she doesn't like."

"The idea!" said Kate Wells; "I thought everybody drank cider."

Now Kate Wells was one of the best-dressed little girls in the room; in fact, she was always well-dressed, and she lived in an elegant house, with lovely lawns about it, and a carriage-drive up to the door, and she rode on horseback a wonderful little pony of her own, and her father was the richest man in town. I wonder, after all I have told you, if you are astonished at Beth Stone for taking sips of cider with the rest! Little bits of sips they were, and they did not taste good to her at all; in fact, she told herself that she did not see what they wanted to make such a fuss over cider for, she hated it. Yet she sipped it. Reuben was astonished. He stared over at Beth in a way that made her glowing cheeks feel as though they would blaze; and she even spilled a little of her cider on the blue merino. Reuben began to feel as though he really was not acquainted with Beth. When before, in all

her life, had she gone contrary to his views and plans? She had thought as he thought, liked what he liked, and hated what he hated with all her earnest little heart, until now, when something, the name of which he did not know, had come in between them. Even if somebody had told him that the name of this enemy was pride, I am not sure that he would have understood, he knew so little about such an enemy.

"No, I thank you," he said when his glass of cider was passed, and he said it in a louder and firmer tone than he would have used had not Beth been sitting opposite to him just then, sipping hers.

"What!" said black Nancy; "ain't got a boy here that don't like cider!"

"No," said Reuben again, in that very clear, firm tone; "I like it first-rate; but I won't drink it all the same."

"Why not?"

"Because I have signed a temperance pledge, for one thing."

"Ho!" said Harry Jones, crossly; "temperance pledges have nothing to do with cider; everybody drinks it."

"My pledge has something to do with cider: it speaks it right out; and if it didn't I would have it put in. I have been thinking about it a good deal, all this winter, and I've found lots of temperance folks, and a good many books, that don't believe in cider at all."

"But this is nothing but sweet cider."

This Stella Burns said, speaking a little timidly. She belonged to a temperance society, and had signed a pledge that had cider in it, and she wanted to do right, but she had made her weak little conscience believe that the pledge couldn't possibly have meant sweet cider, for everybody said that did no more harm than water.

The simple truth was that she had not heard "everybody" say any such thing; only three of her schoolmates had said so.

"There isn't any such thing as sweet cider," declared Reuben boldly, "not of the kind that people drink; it begins to have alcohol in it before it is a day old, and people don't like the taste of it until it does have."

"Where is your cider mill?" asked Arthur Holmes, and the others laughed. But Harry Jones had no idea of letting the argument go, and he began to question and cross-question in a way that showed his conscience was a little touched, and Reuben answered in a way that showed he had studied the matter and was prepared to argue. But some of the boys had no idea of getting themselves worsted in an argument; they had not forgiven Reuben for refusing to laugh with them over the trick played on Teddy; they were in no mood to hear more from him.

"Poh!" said Arthur Holmes; "let him alone, what's the use of talking? It's natural enough that he shouldn't want to drink cider; his great-grandfather and his grandfather were both drunkards, and

his father when he was a small boy laughed at another boy for being afraid to say his prayers, and then to drown his remorse took to drinking cider, and was never heard of afterwards."

Arthur Holmes was nearly four years older than Reuben, and had the name of being very witty; this must account for the folly and falsehood in his sentence. Some of the boys laughed, many of them seemed to think they must when Arthur spoke, but two or three looked over at Reuben as though they thought this was pretty hard, and they were sorry for him.

Reuben, however, was not at all troubled; he was one of those fortunate boys who always grew unconcerned when people began to say false and foolish things about him.

Had there been even a shadow of truth in Arthur's words, I do not know how he might have felt, but as it was he fixed a pair of good-natured eyes on Arthur, as he said:

"You are not very good at it after all. You ought to hear some of the poor fellows who get their living by telling stories; they could beat you all to pieces, and scare you too, sometimes. There won't be any more truth in what they say than there is in what you have been saying, but then, you see, they don't know any better."

This time the laugh was against Arthur, most of the listeners having sense enough to see that Reuben had given him a very sharp answer.

"Let him alone," said John Stuart, good-naturedly.

"If a fellow doesn't want to drink sweet cider, I don't believe in making him do it; there will be all the more left for us."

But Kate Wells had no idea of giving it up in that way. She brought her sparkling glass of cider, and sat down beside Reuben.

"But I want you to tell me," she began in a clear voice that could be heard all over the room, "just why you don't believe in drinking sweet cider. You are not really afraid of being a drunkard, are you?"

"Yes," said Reuben, soberly; "I am afraid of being a drunkard."

And Beth, hearing this, hearing the exclamations of surprise and dismay and amusement that went around the room, felt as though she would like to slip down through the floor somewhere, out of sight.

"But that is being a coward!" said Kate Wells, who nearly always spoke her thoughts aloud, without stopping to think how they would sound.

The boys laughed at this, and Arthur Holmes said:

"That's plain English, anyhow."

"What is being a coward?" Reuben asked, and Kate tried to answer:

"Why—why—it's being afraid, of course."

Then all the boys and some of the girls tried to talk at once, and tell what they thought was the meaning of the word coward, and they got into such confusion that John Stuart said:

"Hold on, I'll ask the old fellow in the bookcase

what he thinks about it; his opinion is worth three of ours, any day." So he dragged down "Webster Unabridged," and, poring over it a few minutes, read aloud:

"Coward: a person who lacks courage to meet danger."

Most of the listeners seemed surprised by this definition; it did not quite seem to fit Reuben for refusing to drink cider; but Arthur Holmes was for holding to it.

"Well, suppose there was danger to some people in drinking cider—mind you, I don't believe it—but suppose there was, then the people who are all the time so afraid of the danger that they can't enjoy it, nor let anybody else enjoy it, are cowards, I should think."

"Hold on," said Reuben. "If there is danger to anybody, then I must have a good reason for going into it, and setting other people an example to follow, mustn't I? That is what we agreed in the class, only last Sunday, anyhow. Now, where's my good reason for drinking cider, if there is a fear that anybody in the world might be harmed by it?"

"I didn't say there was any such fear," said Arthur.

But the talk was getting away from where Kate Wells wanted to keep it.

"But what I want to know is," she said, looking at Reuben, "why you come to be different from the rest of the boys about this? What made you think of cider, and decide that it was wrong to drink it,

and give it up when you say you like it? Did anybody tell you you must?

"Of course there did. His mother told him to-night just before he left home that if he drank a drop of cider she would tie him to the bedpost and feed him on castor oil for a week."

Of course this was Arthur Holmes who was trying so hard to be funny; but the boys were not ready to laugh, they were listening to Reuben's answer.

"Yes," he said, speaking slowly and gravely, "somebody told me I mustn't. I'm a soldier; I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. I've promised to fight for everything that is right, and to fight against everything that is wrong, as long as I live; and I know rum is wrong, and I know it leads people down to awful places. I've seen more of it than any of you, I suppose; you can't walk through the streets of a big city, as I did every day for years, without seeing enough of it to make you hate it. I've been in terrible danger, too, with a drunken man; it wasn't my father;" and here Reuben's eyes flashed. "My father has been dead so many years that I don't remember him at all, but I know he hated rum. It was a stranger to me, but I thought that he and I would both be killed together, all because of rum, and I hate it. I talked with a friend about cider, and she showed me plain enough that there was danger in it, and since then I've read about it, and heard two temperance lectures on it by great men, and I know there is danger in it; so then it is wrong, and

I'm bound to fight against it, because I am a soldier."

It was a long speech for Reuben to make. When he began, he had not the least idea that he would say so much, but the words seemed to come almost without his knowing it.

Nobody laughed when he stopped, and some of the little girls set back their glasses and concluded they didn't want any more cider.

"Come," said John Stuart at last, "we've had talk enough; let's play some games."

Soon afterwards Beth and Reuben took the stillest walk home that they had ever taken in their lives. Reuben was dumb with disappointment over the evening; not for what the boys had said; he had been used to boys all his life, rougher boys than these ever thought of being, but because Beth had not said and done as he thought she would. The winter which was now almost gone had been a disappointment to him in this regard.

In his honest and earnest heart Reuben had fully expected Beth to join him as soon as ever she heard of the great news that he was a soldier; indeed he had no thought of going without Beth.

But, to his great dismay, she was not interested in his new hopes and plans. Her head was full of her pretty new dresses and ruffles, and new ways of braiding her hair, and in looking and acting as much as possible like other little girls of her age. She worked hard on her bright brass machine, driving the needle between the shining teeth in a way that

astonished even herself, and earning more money each day than her mother had been able to earn in the city, working twelve hours a day; but her ambition was to earn money enough to go to school, and study French, and perhaps, after awhile, take music lessons.

"Who knows?" said Beth to herself. "A great many wonderful things have happened this year; some more things may happen before the year is out."

So, though she was bright and eager and industrious, as ready as ever to enter into all Reuben's plans for work or study, on this one subject, that was every day growing to be more to Reuben than anything else, she was unconcerned. So they were both still on this moonlight evening as they walked home together from their first party. Neither was as blissfully happy as both had expected to be.

"O, Beth!" Reuben said at last, "I didn't think you would drink the cider."

"Why not, I wonder? I haven't signed your old pledge, and I don't mean to. I think it is silly, anyway, and awfully proud in you, Reuben Stone, to set yourself up to know more than all those boys and girls who have been to school all their lives. I only sipped the cider, and it was nice and sweet, and if you had kept still I might have had a nice time; and I didn't a bit; and I never want to go anywhere again, so there!"

Reuben had never in his life heard his sister talk

in that fashion before ; he did not know what to say. At last he tried to explain.

" But, Beth I couldn't, you know. I had signed the pledge ; and I couldn't, anyway, because I am a soldier, and oh, Beth ! I thought you were going to be one ! "

" Well, I'm not ! " declared Beth, in her sharpest tone. " I don't want to be a soldier, nor anything that makes you different from other people. I've been different all my life—never had things, nor gone to places, nor done like other little girls ; and now, just when I've got a chance to be like them, and have a good time, you go and spoil it all with your notions about its being wrong to drink cider, and wrong to laugh at a funny story, and wrong to do anything ; and you go and tell them about your never having had any chances, and about newboys, and boot-blacks, and everything ! You never used to be so ! Before you went and got these notions you would do anything for me, and now you spoil all the good times I might have ; and I never want to be a soldier at all ; and I wish you wasn't one, so there ! "

And poor angry little Beth burst into a perfect passion of tears, and dashed into the house like a comet.

And that was the way that first evening out, to which they had looked forward, ended.

No, not quite that way. Beth went directly upstairs, but Reuben stopped in the little parlour a moment. No one was there but Miss Hunter.

She greeted him with a cheery smile, and a question:

"Well, my boy, did you see anything of Satan to-night?"

"O, Miss Hunter! he was there all the time, and busier than I ever saw him before."

"I'll warrant you; get a party of boys and girls together, and he's on hand."

"And, Miss Hunter, he is after Beth."

"Of course he is. Do you think he is going to let such a pretty, bright little girl as Beth alone, and let her slip away from him without a hard fight? He is much too sharp a captain for that. Don't you let him get her, my boy."

"I don't know," said Reuben, doubtfully. "I don't believe I can help it; down there in the city, where there were fifty chances for going wrong where there is one here, she was just the best girl! I thought maybe after I found out about it that she had been a soldier all the time, and didn't know it. But up here, where everything is nice and pleasant, and it is as easy again to do right, she seems just as different, you can't think."

"Yes, I can think," said Miss Hunter, nodding her grey head. "Satan has different ways for different people, and he knows just how to catch a pretty girl like our Beth: it is twice as hard a place for her to do right in as it was in that dingy north room of yours, shut up with her mother. But look here, my boy, *you* can't do much, to be sure, alone; but isn't that Captain of yours strong enough

to manage Satan in the country as well as in the city? Do you suppose he has got any plans that your Captain don't understand? Well, then, just you go to Him about Beth: tell Him the whole story, and ask Him to show you just how to get her to wear your colours. If I were you, I would tell Him all about it this very night."

Reuben did.

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CHAPTER XXV.

AT BETH'S SUGGESTION.

"THERE ought to be some way thought out for keeping these wrists in shape, after you get them done ; great use in silking them so nice, and patting and smoothing them, when you know they'll be poked into a great box that doesn't fit them, and be all rumpled up dreadfully."

This was Beth, talking to herself, while she looked over and put the finishing touches on a dozen ladies' gauntlet gloves, that she had taken unusual pains in silking. At least, she concluded that she was talking to herself ; Reuben was in the room, and had been for an hour, and Beth had said a good deal during the hour ; at first to him, but, finding him eager over the arithmetic lesson that was puzzling him, and getting no answer save an absent-minded "um," now and then, which he meant for "yes," Beth had tried to keep still. Whether the subject had specially interested him, or whether it was because he had just conquered a troublesome example, I do not know ; but as Beth finished her lecture about the gauntlets, he looked up from his slate and said :

"What did you say, Beth ?"

"Oh," said Beth, "you've got back, have you? I've been talking to you by spells for the last half-hour, and I might as well have talked to the lamp."

Reuben laughed, owned that he had been bothered by an example, but had beaten it, and then asked again what she said about boxes.

"Oh," said Beth again, "it was that word that waked you up: say anything about boxes, and if you are within a hundred miles you will hear; well, I said that some of you ought to contrive better-shaped boxes for these beautiful gauntlet gloves than the ones you stuff them into; I know they must come out looking horrid, and I think it is too bad; look at these, Reuben. Isn't that orange silk too lovely for anything?"

"That's an idea," said Reuben, taking the gauntlet in hand, and looking as though the orange silk was very far from his thoughts, though he stared at it with wide-opened, dreamy eyes.

That was really the beginning of it. The arithmetic suffered somewhat after that for days together; the mother, looking on, was a good deal disturbed; she wanted Reuben to be a scholar; his grandfather had been, and she had watched the bringing out of the arithmetic, and heard Reuben's determination to catch up with the rest of the boys, so he could join the class by next fall, with great satisfaction. Now the question was, what had taken his attention so completely that for three evenings he did not open the arithmetic?

"Never you mind," said Miss Hunter, nodding her

head. "The boy has an idea, and he is planning to carry it out. I see him busy thinking, even while he is eating his supper; there isn't any mischief brewing as long as he has such clear eyes as those, and prays every evening the way he does; don't *you* be afraid."

"You don't think he *can* do anything wrong?" said Mrs. Stone, but she smiled as she said it; she was very proud of Reuben.

Now what was he about? Well, I suppose you have forgotten all about those seven pasteboards out of which he meant to make his fortune; but you may be sure he had not. All through the winter, which was now quite gone, he had thought about them more or less, gone often to look at them in the corner of the attic where they were stored, and thought over and cast aside several plans for making something new and wonderful out of them. Nothing suited him; he wanted something different from what had ever been seen, and he could not decide on what it should be. The moment Beth began her argument against the boxes now in use for her favourite gauntlets, he was interested; a thought came into his mind, and grew as the days went by.

First experiment did not succeed; in fact one entire sheet of the seven was spoiled before anything had come of his idea.

Meantime Beth grew almost discouraged over his stillness and dreaminess.

"It is worse than arithmetic," she told Miss Hunter. "For then I could get him to say a

word once in awhile; but now he just sits and stares at the sky, or the trees, and doesn't open his lips."

"You wait," said Miss Hunter; "something will come of it, I know." Miss Hunter believed in Reuben.

It was nearly two weeks after the new idea had taken root that Reuben came home one evening with a radiant face. He could hardly eat his supper, and made them all laugh by trying to eat his syrup with a fork, and stir his milk with a knife. He seized upon the bread-dish the moment supper was over, and followed Beth to the cellar for a confidential talk.

"Beth," he said, his face aglow with triumph, "I've got it!"

"Have you?" said Beth with provoking coolness, as she stooped over the cookie-crock. "I hope it is worth having, and that you will give me a piece of it."

Reuben laughed gleefully. "I'll do that," he said; "at least you shall have a piece of the 'thank you' that I feel sure Mr. Barrows will give me. I am going to tell him that you deserve the largest half of it, for it was you that gave me the idea in the first place."

"Reuben," said Beth, seating her lamp on the potato-box and herself on an overturned tub, "what do you mean?"

"Why, that night—don't you know, when you found fault with the boxes that they pack gauntlets

in? I never thought of it before, how awkward they are, but that set me to thinking and planning until now I've got the nicest kind of a box for them; I made one, a regular beauty, brought it home under my work apron, and hid it in the parlour. I wanted you to see it before anybody else did, and tell me what you thought of it; not a soul has laid eyes on it. Are there any gauntlets in the house?"

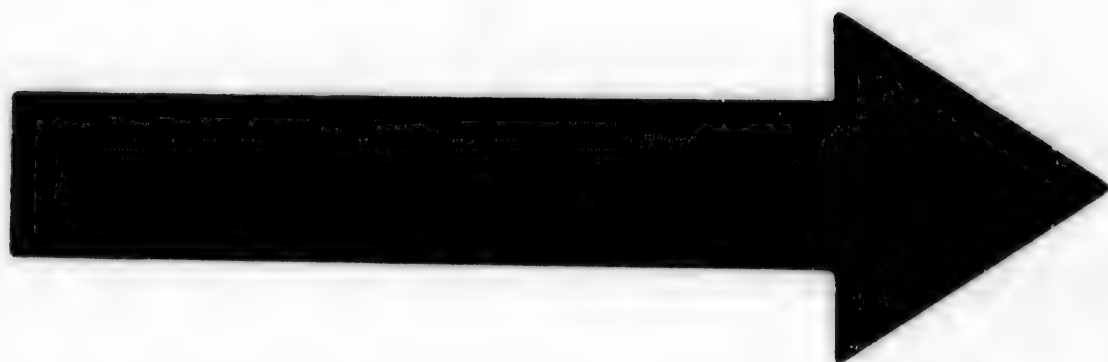
"Yes, there are some beauties that I finished just this afternoon; the wrists are lined with dove-coloured silk, and they are finished with the most lovely shade of blue silk! If you have a box as pretty as they are it must be a beauty."

"Come, children," called Mrs. Stone. "What in the world keeps you so long in the cellar?"

It was not until the dishes were washed and the little kitchen in complete order, that Reuben had a chance to show his treasure. Then he and Beth went to the parlour; Beth with a pair of the lovely gauntlets under her arm for a trial.

It was a perfect fit! An entirely new idea—a box finished with more care than usual, in green and gold, and looking on the outside like all other boxes; but within an ingenious piece of pasteboard had been fitted in such a way that it shaped the graceful wrist of the gauntlet exactly, and kept it from being crushed.

Beth clapped her hands in delight. "They will be worth more money, I know they will!" she said eagerly.



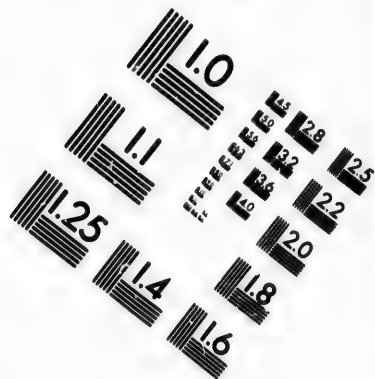
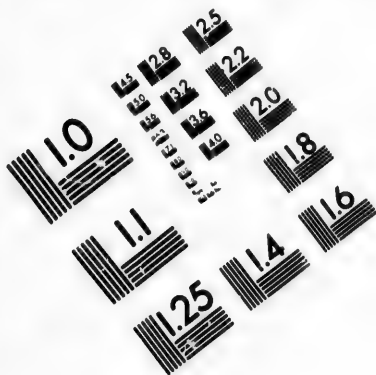
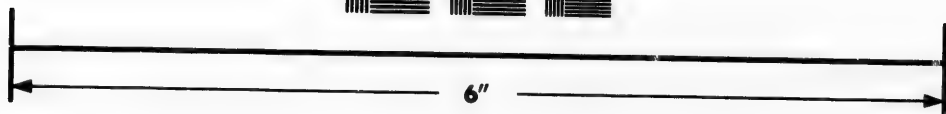
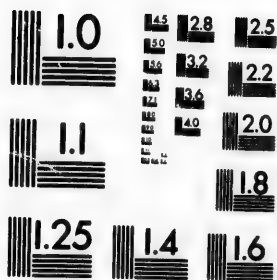


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"One day I said to Mr. Barrows that it was too bad to crumple them all up in that way, and that there ought to be boxes on purpose for them; but he said that couldn't be done, because they were such a queer shape that no machinery could cut them, and nobody could make them after they were cut; but this is easy enough I should think, and it doesn't take up a speck more room than the other way. What a queer little twisty piece of pasteboard that is, Reuben. How did you ever get it to fit in as it should?"

"I had an awful time with it," admitted Reuben. "For awhile I thought I would have to give it up; and I tell you I felt badly! I couldn't get to sleep at night for thinking of it, and one night don't you believe I dreamed about it! You see it wouldn't bend enough without breaking; but one day I hit upon this plan of cutting little niches at regular places, and it worked like a charm. I'll tell you what, Beth, this is the only one I have made, but I want to get half a dozen made up out of my sheets, you know, and I want them made beautifully, with lovely coloured paper, and trimmed elegantly, you know, and I want you to help me about it. I have money enough from that I saved over, you know, that mother let me have for the boots and hat, to buy some elegant paper, and I want them to be the handsomest boxes that ever were seen in our shop; and I want you to help me."

"Well," said Beth, "I will."

After that Reuben was busier than ever: only

Beth was in the secret now, and they worked together of evenings in the little kitchen as late as the mother would allow; she looking sober meantime, over the arithmetic, but trying to take Miss Hunter's advice and wait a bit.

At last they were ready for exhibition, the entire half-dozen, and very handsome boxes they were. Beth, with her talent for pretty things, and her fondness for learning to do whatever she saw done, by dint of making many visits to Reuben in the box-shop, and keeping her bright eyes wide open, was no mean hand at the box business; she worked slowly of course, but very neatly, and she knew how to choose her colours so as to harmonize them well, which was more than Mr. Barrows' foreman often did. So the boxes were carried in triumph to mother and Miss Hunter, some very handsomely made gauntlet gloves showing off their beauty in their new houses in a way that they had never been able to do before.

But, dear me! I don't know how to tell you how pleased Mr. Barrows was with the new idea.

He came over to the little house on purpose to take a more careful look at the boxes, and inquire into their management. He questioned and cross-questioned Reuben as to how he did this and managed that, and Beth not only, but the mother and friend, listened, well pleased at Reuben's eager explanations, and thought it not too high praise when Mr. Barrows said at last that it was a complete success, and that a hundred of them should be

manufactured right away, and placed in the sales-room on exhibition; and that it was a capital idea, and he believed manufacturers would all be willing to pay a trifle more for the boxes, since their goods would show to so much better advantage.

"You certainly deserve a great deal of credit," he said, turning to Reuben, "for thinking out and carrying out this idea."

"I didn't do all the thinking," declared Reuben, eagerly. "Beth made me think of it in the first place, or I don't suppose it would ever have entered my head."

"I!" exclaimed Beth, surprised out of her usual timidity before Mr. Barrows. "Why, Reuben, all I ever did was to grumble because they rumbled up the pretty gauntlets so in the boxes that didn't fit them."

"Yes," Reuben said, "and that was exactly what set me thinking about it."

Everybody laughed over this, and Mr. Barrows said it would be a good thing if all grumbling could be turned to so good an account.

But the most surprising part of the talk was yet to come. Mr. Barrows had talked for some time with Mrs. Stone, then with Miss Hunter, and a little with Miss Beth herself, when he suddenly turned to Reuben with a question:

"Well, young man, what are you going to charge me for this invention of yours?"

"Why!" said Reuben, in great amazement and embarrassment; "nothing, sir, of course."

"I'm sure I can't see why, provided you mean to let me have it at all; it is a good and useful thing, and I'm inclined to think will please the manufacturers very much. It isn't mine though, any more than that jacket you have on is mine, or those new boots I saw you wear the other day. The question is, what will you charge me for the use of it, if I am to have the use of it? Or do you mean to sell it to some of the other manufacturers?"

Reuben's face was very red.

"It is for you, of course, sir," he said eagerly; "and if it is of any good, I'm as glad as I can be."

"But, my boy, I thought those seven pasteboards were for you to make your fortune with; you won't make it very fast at that rate, I'm afraid."

But Reuben, laughing and blushing away up to the roots of his hair, declared that they had begun already to make his fortune, for they had made him feel that maybe he could do things, and think of things.

"Well," said Mr. Barrows at last, "if you won't sell your brains to me, I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll have some boxes made up in our best style, and put on exhibition, and I believe the manufacturers will be delighted with them, and we'll sell them for two dollars on a hundred more than the others, and one of those dollars I'll have, to pay for the additional trouble of making the boxes in this way, and the other dollar you shall have as a nest-egg for that fortune we talked about."

Never was there a boy more astonished. It was

plain that he had not been working for money, nor had he expected any, and he was very earnest in his explanations; but Mr. Barrows assured him that it was all right, that of course he ought to be paid for his thought, if it proved worth paying for, and the manufacturers would soon decide that.

Then he went off into an explanation of how the accounts could be kept, and how the machinery could be set for cutting the ingenious little partitions, and who would be the best person to glue them in, and from this, to explanations as to why it would be best for Reuben not to let any of the other boys know about this private understanding between them, and was altogether so business-like, and yet so kind, talking with him as though he were already a man indeed, as well as the man of that little house, that Reuben's head was well-nigh turned with business and pleasure by the time Mr. Barrows went away.

As for Beth, she professed not to be surprised at all, but declared that of course Mr. Barrows ought to pay for the idea, why shouldn't he? It was a good one, and it wasn't his; for her part she *knew* it would work; the manufacturers would like it, they couldn't help it; the gloves were all rumped up now, and they must know it, and she shouldn't wonder if Reuben really *would* make his fortune out of it yet.

There was much laughing and talking, and great excitement in the little house that night. At last the mother brought them back to everyday work by a very sensible remark: "There's one thing I hope, Reuben, now that you've got this plan well out of

your head, and that is that you'll go back to your arithmetic with all your might. If you are going to invent things, or do much of anything else that is worth doing, you'll have to know a great deal that they learn out of books."

"That's true," said Reuben. "And I mean to *know* things, mother, whether I invent things or not."

"Yes," said Beth, "and if I am to be the sister of an inventor, I must know things too."

So with much laughing, though it was rather late, they settled themselves to arithmetic, and worked an example that very evening that Reuben called a "tough fellow."

In thinking of it long afterwards, it seemed strange to Reuben that his great trouble should have followed so hard after this first little success of his. Almost as if it were jealous of the victory, and meant to make him suffer for it at once.

He went to bed that night so happy, so very happy, that he told Beth if she should hear him burst out laughing in the middle of the night because he was so bubbled up with joy that he couldn't keep it in, she need not be surprised.

And the very next night when he went to bed his heart felt as heavy as a lump of lead!

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT FOLLOWED IT.

It was toward the middle of the next forenoon. Work was moving on very briskly in the box factory; the busy season was fairly upon them, and all hands were pushing things. Reuben had not seen Mr. Barrows that morning, but he had seen and heard a good deal that made his cheeks red and his heart beat high with pleasure. The half-dozen handsome boxes were arranged in a very prominent place in the great sales-room, and more than half a dozen of the leading manufacturers of the town had dropped in on business, and been shown the new invention by the foreman. And every one of them had expressed satisfaction over the plan, and, what was more to the point, every one of them had ordered a few for trial.

Reuben, keen-eyed and quick-witted as he was, felt almost sure now that they would succeed. It was great fun to go back and forth on errands, and hear the bits of talk, and know himself to be in the secret, and have none of the others know anything about it. He liked it better than he would to have had people know that the thought was his; though Beth was for being indignant over this part of the

arrangement, and believed that everybody ought to be told who invented the box.

Several times during the morning Reuben wondered where Mr. Barrows was, and why he did not come to talk with the manufacturers. At last he heard with great satisfaction the call to go to the office.

Mr. Barrows was at the desk, surrounded by files of papers and blank books. He looked very grave, and Reuben decided at once that something troubled him; some business matter, perhaps, which had driven all thought of the new boxes from his mind. He seemed to have nothing to say to Reuben, after all. Just raising his eyes for a moment as the boy came in, he dropped them again on the column of figures before him, and Reuben waited.

"Have you nothing to say to me, sir?"

No, it was not the boy who asked the question, but the man, after Reuben had waited in respectful silence for some minutes.

"I!" Reuben was too much astonished to say more. Then he rallied. "Why, yes, sir; there is ever so much to say; six of the manufacturers have been in, and Mr. Burnside is there now; they have all ordered boxes, and they said a good many nice things about them. Mr. Anderson said——"

A slight movement of impatience from Mr. Barrows stopped his eager tongue.

"I am not thinking about the boxes," said that gentleman, "nor do I want to hear anything about them. The question is: What have you to say to me about the horse?"

"The horse, sir!"

And now Reuben was not only too much astonished, but too thoroughly bewildered to say more. What could he possibly have to say about the horse! But Mr. Barrows waited, until at last he stammered forth:

"I don't know what you mean, sir. I don't know of anything that I ought to say about Samson."

"You don't?"

"No, sir."

"Well, it is my opinion that you ought to know of a good deal that should be said about him. Reuben, it is worse than idle to waste your time and my patience in this way. I have been waiting all the morning in the hope that I was not so utterly deceived in you as the case appeared; in the hope that you would come to me with some explanation, or at least confession; but I waited in vain; and now, when I send for you, I find nothing but an attempt to deceive me."

"Mr. Barrows, I haven't a thing to confess, and I don't know what you mean."

Reuben's great earnest eyes looked steadily into Mr. Barrows' face as he said these words, and the gentleman in his turn seemed bewildered. At last he said:

"It cannot be, Reuben, after the trust I have put in you, that you would be so entirely false. I must believe that you do not know how much injury you have done. I have to tell you, then, that the poor horse is hopelessly injured, and is suffering greatly.

We have great fears that we shall have to kill him to put him out of misery."

Then, indeed, did Reuben's face change; it grew pale; his voice was eager and full of pain.

"Oh, poor Samson! How did it happen? Can't they do something for him? How did you find it out? Mr. Barrows, I heard the foreman tell yesterday of that new man on Main Street, how he cured a horse that was hurt awfully. Couldn't you have him?"

"Everything is being done that is possible." Mr. Barrows spoke the words very coldly. "And as to how it happened, I am waiting to have you tell me."

The words and the tone recalled to Reuben the fact that for some reason Mr. Barrows was displeased with him, and now it flashed over him that he was suspected of having hurt the horse. He was so surprised and grieved that he could hardly speak the words distinctly, yet he poured them forth:

"Oh, Mr. Barrows, do you think—do you suppose—you *can't* believe that I would hurt Samson! Why, I love him!"

"Not intentionally, Reuben, I cannot think that you would; but you see the mischief is done. Now I want the whole story."

"Mr. Barrows, I haven't got any story to tell. I don't know anything at all how Samson got hurt."

Alas for poor Reuben! Mr. Barrows did not believe that this was so. For the last three months the boy had been about the horse every day: watered him, fed him, petted him, driven him to the store and

the office, driven around the block with him again and again while they waited for his master; the only boy in his employ that the master had allowed to have anything to do with his valuable horse.

Since the attempt to steal Samson for a night's ride, which Reuben had spoiled, a padlock with a very peculiar lock had been placed on the barn; to this lock there were two keys: one for Mr. Barrows, and one for Rupert, the trusted hired man. For nearly a week Rupert had been sick in his bed, and Reuben had taken more care than ever before of the horse, and had been trusted to carry the other key, that he might pay Samson a visit when necessary while Mr. Barrows was absent. This morning the barn had been found locked as usual, but the poor horse was holding up one trembling leg, and groaning sadly. Mr. Barrows, thinking it all over, had believed that the temptation to take a horseback ride had been too much for Reuben, and that he had gone in the night, and, getting into trouble, had hurried the horse back to the stable, locked the door, and left him in his misery. This had been a hard thing to forgive; but, as he talked with Reuben, he decided that the boy had not known before that Samson was injured. This was bad enough, but still not so dreadful as the other; now, if he would but confess it all!

But here he stood, boldly denying that he had any knowledge of the trouble.

"Reuben," after a moment of solemn silence, "where is the padlock key I allowed you to carry?"

"In my jacket pocket, sir, that hangs by my corner in the workroom."

"I know it. I took pains to learn that it was there. And mine is in my pocket; and you and I know that only those who have been very carefully taught can turn that lock; Rupert and you and I know how. Rupert is sick in bed, my key is here on my chain, where it has been all the time; the lock is not broken, yet the horse has been out during the night, and has been ruined; and has then been brought home and locked in alone, in his misery. Now, Reuben, will you confess the whole miserable story? I cannot feel that I have acted in a way to make you so terribly afraid to tell me the truth. I have loved you, my boy, because you reminded me of my own boy who is gone; but he was truthful and noble."

Not a word said Reuben. If he had suddenly been turned to stone he could not have stood stiller, or been more silent.

Mr. Barrows watched him and waited. His face was pale, very pale, and his eyes had the troubled look of one who does not see his way clear. One, two, five minutes, and they seemed to him afterwards like hours; then he spoke:

"Mr. Barrows, everything is against me. I don't see how you *can* believe me. I know I have that key safe in my pocket, and I know the lock can't be turned with any other kind of a key, or by people who don't know how; and I can't tell anything about it—only this: I never took Samson out of his stall.

He was as well and happy as could be last night at eight o'clock, when I locked him in for the night, and I haven't seen him since, and I don't know how he got hurt ; and oh, I am so sorry for him ! But, Mr. Barrows, everything is against me, and I don't see how you can believe me."

Said Mr. Barrows, with a disappointed sigh :

" You are right, Reuben ; I can't."

Then began a sad time for Reuben. Samson had to be killed, and that almost broke the boy's heart ; but, worse than that, he found no way to prove that he had nothing to do with the trouble. But you should have seen Beth. She was furious. The idea that Mr. Barrows should not believe every word that Reuben said was, to her mind, an insult too deep to be borne. She urged Reuben not to do another hour's work for him, but to tell him to look out for a boy that he thought he could trust. She urged her mother to move at once out of his house, and to refuse to have anything more to do with him, and had only a burst of tears in answer to the question, Where would they go ?

As for the mother, she did not help her boy very much. She believed in him. Oh yes, indeed ! It did not once occur to her to think that he had spoken other than the truth. You see she had known Reuben so long, and been able to trust him so fully, that the habit was formed : but she fretted, and said some things that were hard to bear ; such as this :

" It serves you right, Reuben, for meddling with the horse at all ; if you had kept away from him as

the other boys do, you wouldn't have got into any trouble. Why doesn't he suspect them?"

Then would Reuben try to explain that his employer had given him duties about the horse, trusted him to his care, and that it was as much a part of his work at times to care for Samson as it was to go to the shop.

But the mother would answer :

"Oh, yes, a part of your work! I know that; but if you hadn't always been hanging around the horse, and petting him, and showing yourself so eager and able to take care of him, Mr. Barrows would not have thought of such a thing, and you such a little fellow!"

Then would Reuben sigh, and look utterly discouraged, and the mother would hasten to say :

"Not that I blame you; you did it all for the best, I dare say; and if the man had common sense, he would know he could trust you; but it is all very hard—you had such a splendid chance, and I thought he would send you to school."

Meantime, Miss Hunter was the cheeriest friend he had.

"It'll all come right," she would say, nodding her wise head. "Trust *Him*; He never makes mistakes, nor forgets. Just keep telling Him all about it, as though you knew He would take care of it, and He will."

And Reuben would smile and feel his heart warm within him at the remembrance of his powerful Friend.

Beth was apt to torment him with questions hard to answer. As for instance:

"Reuben, haven't you the least kind of a notion who might have taken the horse?"

"What's the use of notions without proofs?" would Reuben answer. "Notions are mean; they make a fellow suspicious."

"But, Reuben, I most know you guess who it might be. Somebody did it, of course. I wish he would get awful sick, and get afraid, and have to confess it."

"That's like a story in a book," would Reuben answer, with a little curl of his wiser lip. "Things don't happen like that out of books."

But then Miss Hunter had a word to say:

"Things don't 'happen' at all, my boy; God looks after them. He can take care of you not only, but of the one who did the mischief, and He'll do it."

"But, Miss Hunter, don't you think it is awful *mean* in Mr. Barrows not to believe Reuben? He never told a lie in his life."

"I don't think it is strange that he doesn't believe me," declared Reuben. "You see it is all against me. I've got the key, and the only key there is besides the one that he carries himself; and I know how to turn the lock, and I was the only one besides Rupert who did; and Rupert was sick in bed, and somebody took the horse out and lamed him, and then put him back there to suffer. I think that was the meanest."

But when Reuben went on in this way, trying to clear Mr. Barrows of meanness for not trusting him, Beth's patience gave out entirely, and she was apt to get almost as angry with Reuben as she was with his master: so among them all Reuben really had a very sad time.

Quite a large number of the handsome boxes were being manufactured, and all who saw them were pleased, but Reuben had almost entirely lost his pleasure in them. It seemed very strange to him that Mr. Barrows did not discharge him. Every morning he went to his work wondering whether it would not be his last day in the box-shop. The truth was that Mr. Barrows, though he still believed him guilty, was sorry for him: he believed that he had been led away by a great temptation, and been frightened by the sad consequences into telling falsehood after falsehood; but he thought by keeping him in his place and being steadily kind to him, Reuben would grow ashamed of his silence, and get courage to confess the whole: so he waited.

And Reuben waited, and prayed, and wondered how it would all end. In spite of his prompt answer to Beth, "What's the use of having notions?" he had one all the same, and could not get away from the thought that in some way his special torment, Andrew Porter, had to do with the trouble. Not that he could make even a guess how it could have been done. He had never shown Andrew his key or boasted of it in any way; if he had, that would not have taught the boy how to use it. "And if he

tried ninety-nine times to unlock it, he would have been as far away from doing it the hundredth time as he was the first; besides, I had the key to the stable myself all the time in my pocket."

So would he argue to himself, growing more and more puzzled as he thought it over, and feeling more and more that Mr. Barrows was not to blame in suspecting him.

"But then," would the boy continue, "somebody unlocked that barn and took out that horse—dear old fellow!—and brought him back again and locked him up, and you see I *know* that I didn't do it, and that thing Mr. Barrows doesn't know; so there I have the advantage of him."

The days went on, and nothing occurred to help him out of his trouble. Mr. Barrows had questioned and cross-questioned Reuben, and was growing every hour more puzzled and anxious.

"I loved the boy almost well enough to give him part of the place of our boy who is gone," he said to his wife. "I meant to do well by him, if this thing hadn't come up. I don't understand it."

"Papa," would Grace Barrows say, with a firm little set of her lips, "Reuben Watson Stone never did it, never!"

And the father would smile, and find himself wondering if Grace were not right; but then, in that case, who did?

Meantime, the boy Andrew walked the streets as well and strong as ever; though as often as Reuben looked at him he could not help remembering Beth's

words: "I wish he would get awful sick, and get afraid, and have to confess it."

Nothing looked more improbable than that Andrew Porter would get "awful sick." This Reuben thought as he overtook him one evening just at the corner, and Andrew turned suddenly and went the other way. As Reuben walked on, he went over again for the hundredth time, the possible reasons he had for suspecting Andrew.

They were very weak ones. He was a mischievous boy, an untruthful boy, and was very fond of horses, and almost squally fond of teasing Reuben Stone. Yet Reuben had to own that he saw no possible way for Andrew to have accomplished this teasing. "If he did it," he told himself with a sigh, "he will keep his secret. He is not the boy to tell of himself, and as for getting sick, there isn't a healthier-looking boy in this town."

Yet the very next morning there was news.

CHAPTER XXVII

JUSTICE AT LAST.

THE boys were full of it when he reached the shop. Had Reuben heard? Did he know about the great fire? Surely he must have heard the fire-bells?

Yes, Reuben had heard the fire-bells, but his mother had objected to his going to the fire, so he had stayed in.

"Humph!" said one of the boys; "I guess Andrew Porter wishes *his* mother had objected, and he had paid any attention to her."

Reuben turned quickly.

"Why, what about him?"

"Why, he went to the fire. It was the machine-shop, you know, burned to the ground—ever so much money lost. Andrew climbed up somewhere—he's always climbing—and the wall gave way, or the stairs, or something, and he fell hundreds of feet, some say; anyhow, they picked him up for dead, but he isn't dead. The doctor just came from there, and I heard him tell Mr. Stuart that the boy was breathing, but that was about all."

As Reuben stood silent for a full minute before turning to his work to think over this wonderful and terrible news, there came to him a curious, pained

feeling, that somehow he was to blame. Had he really wished Andrew to get "awful sick?" Oh, but he had not wanted him to die! Suppose he should die without ever speaking another word! And suppose he had done it! All day Reuben's heart was heavier than ever, but he prayed a great many times that day for the life of Andrew.

The boy did not die. As the days passed, it was found that his life was not in present danger; but with this news came some that seemed to the boys almost as sad as death itself. There was a hush in the shop all the morning after Clarke Potter gave the news. He himself had heard the doctor that very morning tell Andrew's uncle from Eastport, that the fall had hurt his spine in some way, Clarke had not understood how; only this he knew: that the doctor had said positively that the boy would never take another step.

It was three days afterwards that Reuben decided to go and see Andrew Porter. It was not because he had any hope of hearing news from him concerning poor Samson; in fact he did not think of Samson when he decided to go. It was because Clarke said he heard that Andrew was awful lonesome, and complained that the boys did not come to see him.

I really have not time to tell you much about the next three weeks, only in a general way. Reuben carried out his resolve, and went that very evening to ask after Andrew, and found him sick and suffering.

His mother, who had had orders to let "every

fellow in who looked like a boy," took Reuben to his room without warning.

A very short call he made, but he felt so sorry for Andrew, that on the next day he went again, and again: and at last it grew to be a settled thing that not a day would pass without his spending all the time he could get with Andrew. The books suffered a little. He learned a lesson every night, but it was shorter than it used to be, and his mother wondered if he were going to "learn to nurse sick folks" instead of being a scholar; and Beth asked many questions as to why he had grown fond of "that Porter boy, all of a sudden." Reuben owned that he was not fond of him, but that few of the boys came to see him—he seemed not to have many friends; and he was so lonesome. "He is getting used to me now, and likes to have me come; at first he did not seem to want me." This was all the explanation Reuben had, and Beth tossed her head, and thought it was very queer.

As for Mr. Barrows, as the days passed, and Reuben was faithful to his work and respectful, yet came no nearer to that confession for which the gentleman longed, he told himself that he did not know what to think. How could he trust a boy, and do for a boy as he had meant to for him, who had deceived him? How *could* the trouble have happened in any other way than through him! Yet, on the other hand, how could a boy who was so faithful in all other things have so dreadfully deceived him once?

Mr. Barrows was in almost as much trouble as the rest of them. Meantime what Andrew thought as he lay day after day on his bed, much of the time alone, he kept to himself.

It was a lovely summer evening. The windows of Andrew's room were both thrown wide open, and the bed on which he lay was wheeled as near to them as it could be got, and he lay looking out on the lovely fields, green and quiet, thinking perhaps what a strange, sad thing it was that he should never scamper over them again, for his face was very sober.

Reuben, book in hand, waited to go on with the story which he was reading to him, but he put out his hand and motioned the book away.

"No, I want to talk; that is, I've *got* to talk. I've made up my mind; it has taken me weeks to do it, and I never thought I should; and I suppose I might have waited to hear the last of the story, for you won't want to read it to me when I'm done my talk; but I'm going to tell it right here this minute."

"All right," said Reuben, "talk away."

"But you won't say much more to me in that good-natured way, old fellow, when you've heard my talk. I've got something awful to tell you. Reuben, it was I that took Samson out that night and brought him back again."

"I thought as much," said Reuben, his voice very quiet and matter-of-course. He had not thought

over this whole thing for weeks without learning to keep his face quiet when there was need.

"You did!"

In spite of the poor back there was a little start from the boy on the bed that made a quiver of pain shoot all through him.

"Yes, I did. Do be careful, Andrew! don't make the least bit of a move again. What will the doctor say if you get up a fever? I think I better read now."

"What made you think it was I?"

"Oh, I don't know. I just kind of felt maybe it was; somebody had to do it, you see; and I knew I didn't."

"But how did I get in?"

"That's more than I know or can guess; and it is what made the whole thing seem foolish; only, you see, *somebody* got in, and it might as well have been you as anybody. Now, shall I read?"

"No; I'm going to tell you all about it. I didn't mean any harm to you, Reuben, not a bit. I began to like you a little before this. I guess I kind of liked you all the time. I didn't mean to do any harm to anybody. I thought he was dreadful afraid of his old horse, and I knew I could ride horseback, and I thought he considered himself so smart about that key, that I just longed to try my hand with it; I most knew it was like the locks uncle James makes; he's my uncle up in Eastport; he makes all kind of locks, and he had one real

super that I learned how to manage. I thought this was like it, and it was—oh, enough like it for me to catch the trick when I saw Rupert locking the barn one day! Well, I didn't mean to steal a key, you know, but he left his right on the desk that afternoon."

"Who did?"

"Mr. Barrows himself. He wears it on that chain, you know; and while I was waiting for him to read the note I brought, he looked at his watch, and the chain got caught somehow, and he worked at it a minute, then he unscrewed the chain and slipped off the keys and laid them down on the desk; then that fellow tumbled through the elevator hole, you know, and yelled, and Mr. Barrows thought he was hurt and ran, and I just picked up the key and ran too."

"But how did it get back on the chain?" said Reuben in utter bewilderment.

"That was easy enough. I didn't know how to do it. I thought I should have to lose the key. I wish now I had done it, and then he would have thought some fellow found it and broke in, and wouldn't have blamed you. I never thought of his being such a moolly as to think you did it. I didn't, honest, Reuben."

"Never mind. What did you do?"

"Why, I went there after milk, and Mr. Barrows was dressing. He had been up in Rupert's room taking care of him; and there lay his watch on the table, and his cuff buttons, and all his fixings. I

just slipped the key on the chain in a twinkling, and went away happy. I thought there wouldn't be any trouble to anybody."

"Then you didn't know Samson was hurt?"

"Not a bit of it. I knew he stumbled, and got his foot in that mean hole in the cross-walk, and limped a little, but that was when we were just home; and I hustled him into the barn, and thought he would be all right in the morning; but it turned out just awful!"

"Oh," said Reuben, "I'm so glad!"

"Glad of what?"

"Why, that you didn't know how poor Samson was hurt. It did seem too awful in anybody to leave him to suffer."

"Well, I didn't think about his being hurt much of any. I was cut up awfully when I heard the news next day; then, next thing I heard he thought it was you. He might have known better than that, seems to me. I'd have known it with my eyes shut; as many times as he has held you up to me for a pattern, too!"

Andrew's voice was full of contempt.

"I'll tell you what I did," he went on after a moment. "I watched to see if he would discharge you, then I meant to own up, whatever it cost; but when things went on just as usual, I felt a little better."

"Oh!" said Reuben.

It was every word he said. It all flashed over him, the folly of trying to make a boy like Andrew Porter

understand what he had suffered, and what his mother and Beth had suffered in bearing false blame.

There was more talk, a great deal of it; for now that Andrew's lips were open, he seemed to find comfort in telling all the particulars of those weeks. He told how "beat" he was to think that Reuben should have been the first boy to call on him, and the only one to come to him day after day; and how he had learned to watch for his coming, and how at last, when he made up his mind that he must tell the whole story or he should die, the worst was to think of not seeing him there any more.

"I shall come all the same," said Reuben, quietly. "But now I want to ask you one question more: When do you intend to tell Mr. Barrows?"

"I!" said Andrew; and the dark-red blood rolled into his face. "Why, you can tell him all about it! I'll take the consequences; they can't be very dreadful here on my back. Father would pay for the horse fast enough if he had anything to pay with; but he hasn't, and Mr. Barrows knows it."

"No," said Reuben, firmly. "You're the one to tell."

And to that he held, spite of Andrew's half-tearful arguments. It would be better, a great deal better, both for himself and for Andrew, that the confession should come from him.

"And until you tell it," he said, "I will keep still. I have done it so long, and I can keep on."

At last Andrew owned that it would be the best, but that he was sure he never could; but that if

Reuben would wait, some day he would try; he could not tell when.

And truly it seemed to Reuben as the days passed, that Andrew was very long in keeping his promise. He did not desert him. The readings went on, and the tender care and kindness, and because of the fever and delirium that followed this first talk, he did not hurry him, or indeed say a word more than his wistful eyes said every day. But all the time he could not help wishing and *wishing* that Andrew would get courage to do right. He could not bring himself to be willing to tell the story, for he feared Mr. Barrows and others might think that his only object in going to see Andrew in his trouble was to threaten the facts out of him.

One night he knew as soon as he turned the corner that led to the little house, and saw Beth standing at the gate, that something had happened. Sure enough, she rushed toward him.

"O Reuben, such news! You can't think! Don't you believe that Andrew Porter did it all! And he has had Mr. Barrows there and told all about it, and how good you were, and all. And Mr. Barrows has been here, and he cried, and said he should never forgive himself for thinking hard of you, and I'm sure I don't believe I can ever forgive him; but he was so nice, Reuben, you can't think. And he wants you to go to school all the time, and he is willing to send you to college, and—oh dear! it is such a splendid long story; Reuben, aren't you awfully astonished?"

"No," said Reuben, his eyes shining. "Not much. You see I knew the most of it before."

Then was it Beth's turn to open her eyes, and she stormed him with questions, and overwhelmed him with exclamations for the next half-hour. How could he possibly have kept still all those weeks, thinking that Andrew Porter was the boy? Why didn't he run right home and tell her the minute Andrew confessed it? What was the use in being thought so meanly of a minute longer than was necessary?

After much careful explaining, Reuben succeeded in making his eager sister understand something about the feelings that had kept him patient and quiet all these weeks.

"You see," he said, as a finish to the story, "I could afford to wait, because I knew it would all come out right. I didn't see how, but then I was sure of it, because I'm a soldier, and my Captain is bound to take care of me and see me safe through everything, because He has promised; and it is likely I shouldn't trust Him when I've enlisted to fight under His flag for ever! Oh, Beth, if you only were a soldier too!"

This silenced Beth.

I did mean to stop right here, and not try to tell you anything more about Reuben Watson Stone, though, as you may imagine, there is plenty to tell. But I do feel as though I must tell you about one thing, because it seems to fit in so far back in the story.

Not a week after all these strange things had happened to Reuben, just as he was starting for the shop one morning, a little red and white cow came trotting up the street, a boy guiding her, and a smiling-faced old lady on the side-walk moved towards Reuben.

"How do you do?" she said heartily, as she caught a glimpse of him. "I was in hopes I'd find you in. You remember me, don't you? You found my ticket on the cars, you know, and helped me to the stage afterwards. Oh, I never forgot it, nor your nice, honest face. I've kept an eye on you ever since, though what with sickness in my son's family, and then being sick myself, I haven't got around before. I heard of your trouble, and I heard of your getting out of it. I knew you would, my boy; the Lord takes care of His own, and I knew you was one of His own. I know a good many things about you. Look here!"—and she stepped closer to him, and sank her voice to a whisper—"you didn't know Spunk's master had anything to do with me, now did you? It is queer, but I'm his grandmother, and I've heard about midnight rides and salcons and all that. You did better work that time than you knew of. My grandson hasn't forgot it—can't forget it. He is the 'man of the house' himself, you see—all the son his mother has; and he didn't like the thought of the contrast there would be between you one of these days if he kept on and you kept on, and he has turned square around.

"Well, I oughtn't to keep you away from your work, my man, so if you will just look after Dorcas here, and tell the boy where you would like to have her put, I'll trot on. Why, yes, of course she is yours; a man with a family to support needs a cow, and she is the nicest critter ever was, and gives *cream*, most, instead of milk."

Now I am sure there is no use in trying to describe to you Reuben's astonishment. Isn't it a good place to stop?

And yet there came to him before that day closed what he called the best news he ever had in his life.

It was Beth, curling in a little heap on the sofa beside him, who brought it.

What do you think it was? Why, that at last she had really decided to wear the colours of his Captain, and fight under His flag. Among the pleasant words that she spoke to him that night were the ones that told him she had been led to think carefully about it all from seeing how well he bore the trouble that had come to him. Before that she was getting to have a feeling that it was easy enough for Reuben to be good; everybody praised him and trusted him, and he did almost exactly as he liked, and there wasn't anything for him to be cross about. But afterwards, when she found herself so cross with Mr. Barrows, and so angry at that wicked somebody who brought all this trouble on him, and found Reuben so patient, and so unwilling to have Mr. Barrows blamed, and so cheerful all the

time, she began to see that something had made him very different.

It was quite dusk when they had their happy talk. Reuben had been to pay a visit to the new Samson who lived in the barn, and who already knew him and liked him well. He had fed Dorcas her evening meal, and drank a glassful of her rich creamy milk, and had tucked her away for the night. All the day's duties were done.

Just then the parlour-door opened, and mother came, bringing a lamp, behind her Miss Hunter, looking twice glad, for Beth had given her the good news.

"Come, Reuben," said his mother, "let us have prayers now; it is after eight o'clock. The evenings are growing very short."

So they all knelt down, and the "man of the house," with a full heart, thanked God for all His benefits.

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